

**Not only ‘the younger daughter of Dr Abdurahman’:
A feminist exploration of early influences
on the political development of Cissie Gool**

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Abstract

Cissie Gool was an extraordinary presence on Cape Town's political and social scene in the first half of the twentieth century. She was the first black woman to preside over a national liberatory organisation, the National Liberation League (1935), and the Non-European United Front (1938). She was the only black woman to be elected to the Cape Town City Council before 1994, where she served for 25 years. She was the first black woman to obtain a Master's Degree in Psychology at the University of Cape Town, where she studied on and off from 1918 to the year of her death, 1963. In 1962 she graduated with a BA (LLB), and was the first black woman to be invited to the Cape Bar.

This thesis explores the childhood and early life of Cissie Gool. I examine influences on her political development before she became the leader of the National Liberation League in 1935. This period of her life has left few material traces. Methodologically, this thesis confronts a challenge facing those who wish to discover hidden lives in the South African past. I argue that it is possible to trace influences on such a life if one shifts the lens through which one conducts historical research. Working with a paucity of sources, where most of the people who knew Cissie Gool as a young person are deceased, this thesis searches for and highlights key influences on Gool's early personal-political development.

The thesis rests on a number of premises rooted in feminist theory. I begin from the position that 'the personal is political' and take seriously the argument that the family is a key engine of historical process. I take issue with the statement in much of the secondary literature that Cissie Gool was (merely) 'the younger daughter of Dr Abdurahman', which obscures the fact that this relationship was embedded in a family, in which Cissie's mother was at least as important as her father, and where being a younger daughter with an older sister was significant too. While recognising the significance of the fact that Cissie Gool was fathered by Dr Abdurahman, I underline the centrality of women in a patriarchal society where early socialisation is the specific task of women, and where women and girls experience some degree of social segregation from men and boys.

In addition to focusing the lens on family dynamics, I trace sometimes tenuous but nevertheless real threads linking Cissie Gool to particular political circles on the left in Cape Town in the 1920s and 1930s. I suggest that the leftist heterodoxy which characterised the mature Cissie Gool may be linked to a kindred political spirit among some of her early acquaintances, specifically those at the University of Cape Town, counterposed with the more rigid orthodoxies of friends of the Communist Party on the one hand, and on the other, the so-called Trotskyite purists with whom she was linked by marriage. Cissie Gool, may have been unique in her involvement in all three circles, which intersected at socials hosted by herself and her husband, Dr A H Gool. The androcentricity of both the secondary literature and contemporary documentary sources obscures the specifics of Cissie Gool's political development in this period. Nevertheless, this thesis is based on the premise that, in the absence of more concrete sources, an exploration of the various political circles with which Cissie Gool was associated, in the wider political and socio-economic context of 1920s and 1930s Cape Town, permits one to gain insight into key influences on the political development of Cissie Gool.

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Introduction

This thesis presents a feminist exploration of the early life of Cissie Gool and in the process interrogates the nature of historical evidence. Cissie Gool, born Zainonesa Abdurahman, was a major presence in Capetonian politics from the late 1930s through the 1950s. She was the first black South African woman to preside over a national political organisation (from December 1935) and the only black woman to be elected to the Cape Town City Council before 1994. She was the first black woman to be awarded a Master's Degree at the University of Cape Town, and the first black woman to be called to the Cape Bar.¹ Despite this, she left very few personal traces. This was true of her life as a political leader after 1935, as it was as of her childhood and early adulthood. No diaries or journals exist, and I have located only three letters of a personal nature, two from her later adult life, and one from her childhood.²

Newspapers and other texts reflect various aspects of Cissie Gool's public political life, and many people are still alive who knew her in the 1940s and 1950s. There is a substantial body of primary sources which could be used to write her political life as others saw it.³ So Cissie Gool's life as a political leader may be traced as reflected in public media and popular memory, without in any way challenging how and why we think, research, imagine and write, history. On the other hand, an empiricist rendition of the early life of Cissie Gool is impossible. I was drawn to this part of her life precisely because there seemed to be practically nothing in the way of substantial sources relevant to the life of the young Cissie Abdurahman. That could not be. I decided to investigate the apparent absence of evidence.

¹Cissie Gool graduated with a BA (LLB) in 1962, was called to the bar in June 1963, and died in July, so she never worked in this capacity. See, for instance, *Cape Times*, 6 October 1979.

²The first letter was written in 1911, and is discussed in Chapter Three. The second was in 1946, when Cissie wrote to her mother on the eve of Cissie's imprisonment as part of the Passive Resistance Campaign of 1946 (University of Cape Town, Manuscripts and Archives (hereafter UCT M&A) BCZA 83/35, Abdurahman family collection, microfilm. The third letter was written from prison in 1960, when Cissie was imprisoned again in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre. This letter is in the possession of Mr B de Vries of Cape Town.

³Cissie Gool left remarkably little in the way of her own written perspectives on her life, despite her claim just weeks before her death that she wanted to write her autobiography. If she had collected relevant papers, most of these have disappeared. A friend, Zelda Friedlander, would try to compile a series of personal memoirs of Cissie, as she did for Olive Schreiner, but this would come to naught. Jean Bernardt, in conversation with Gairoonisa Paleker, Centre for Popular Memory, UCT M&A: BC 580: Zelda Friedlander collection. For her compilation of memories of Olive Schreiner, see Z Friedlander, *Until the heart changes: A garland for Olive Schreiner*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1967.

This thesis is concerned with the question of whether a life might be written in the absence of substantial sources, whether a careful reading of silences in the evidential record, as well as a forensic investigation of the few available sources might yield clues. It reflects on the nature of historical evidence, and the role of the historical imagination in the production of history. While it is indisputable that historians must 'go back to the archives', the point of this thesis is that the 'return to the archives' must be with new eyes, new lenses and new analytical tools.⁴ The archives do not easily render up 'the truth', and new ways of seeing are imperative.⁵ One needs to unpack hegemonic discourses that render women invisible.⁶

At the same time, it became clear to me that I could not understand or explain Cissie Gool's political career without some exploration of her earlier life. Through an analysis of sparse primary sources, including a thin oral record, this thesis reflects on some of the circles of influence with which Cissie Gool's early life intersected, before she embarked on full time political activism, in relation to which, *inter alia*, her political trajectory may be traced. Framed within a feminist post-positivist paradigm, the thesis occupies unsettled ground.⁷ I accept the existence of the life of an actual person, a popular political leader known as Cissie Gool, although I recognise, and in some ways underline, the instability of identities. I reject out of hand any pretence at an authoritative rendering of that life on paper, and do not wish to speak 'for' anyone.⁸ I reflect on the evidence for this life, which, at first glance, might appear to be no evidence at all. In so doing, I argue for an interrogation of the production of historical knowledge based on the kinds of evidence produced within a

⁴K Angier, *Patterns of protection: Women industrial workers in Cape Town, 1918 - 1939*. PhD thesis, University of London, 1998, 287.

⁵Andrea Cornwall and Nancy Lindisfarne argue convincingly that academics need to be asking new questions in order to 'dislocate the hegemonic versions of masculinity which privilege some people over others' (introduction to A Cornwall and N Lindisfarne, eds. *Dislocating masculinity. Comparative ethnographies*. London: Routledge, 1994, 4. Thanks to Dr Clowes for alerting me to this sources.

⁶See, for instance, J Hanmer, *Men, power and the exploitation of women*. In J Hearn and D Morgan, eds. *Men, masculinities and social theory*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1990, for a discussion of the continued invisibility of women.

⁷N K Denzin and Y S Lincoln, eds. *Handbook of qualitative research*. London: Sage, 1994, introduction.

⁸Issues of authorship are crucial to feminist biography, and are very widely discussed, often alongside autobiography. See, for instance, J Marcus, *Invincible mediocrity. The private selves of public women*. In S Benstock, ed. *The private self. Theory and practice of women's autobiographical writings*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988, and other essays in this collection; S Alpern, J Antler, E I Perry and I W Scobie, eds. *The challenge of feminist biography. Writing the lives of modern American women*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992; L Stanley, *The auto/biographical 'I': The theory and practice of feminist auto/biography* Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1992; J Sharistanian, Introduction: *Feminism, biography, theory, a/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 8, 2 (Spring 1993), 155 - 158; L Banner, *Biography and autobiography: intermixing the genres*. In *ibid*.

colonial, early industrial, literate, patriarchal society.⁹ This immediately privileges the objects of study: those people or processes accessible within the immense product of the state's archives on the one hand, and, more recently, within the ambit of oral history on the other. Cissie Gool's life is not easily accessed in either of these domains.

If one had to justify a study based on the early life of a South African historical subject, Cissie Gool would pass the 'greatness' test. She was among the most popular leaders of anti-segregationary and later anti-apartheid politics in Cape Town from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s. She was the first, and only, black South African woman president of the National Liberation League in 1935, and then of the Non-European United Front three years later.¹⁰ Not only was she also the first, and only, black woman to be elected to the Cape Town City Council before 1994, but she was continuously re-elected from 1938 until her unexpected death in 1963. In 1978, Cissie Gool was the subject of an honours essay, which provided important clues for the present thesis.¹¹ She has more recently been the subject of a Master's project in the form of a documentary film,¹² and in July 2001 was commemorated by the naming of the Cissie Gool Plaza at the University of Cape Town, where she had studied for her BA, MA and LLB degrees, on and off from 1918 until and including the year of her death. She was admitted to the Cape Bar weeks before her death. Cissie Gool is remembered as a 'brilliant scholar' as well as a dynamic, energetic, fearless presence on the political platforms of the movement against segregation and apartheid.¹³

In the popular mind (as represented in the press), Cissie Gool was imagined as the 'Joan of Arc' of District Six.¹⁴ *Drum* magazine featured her in 1954 in its 'masterpiece in Bronze' series as 'Cape Town's Coloured "Joan of Arc" of non-Whites.'¹⁵ According to another contemporary, she was 'a legendary figure ... a female icon.'¹⁶ She was apparently adored

⁹See S Hall, *The West and the rest: Discourse and power*. In S Hall, D Held and A McGrew, eds. *Modernity and its fixtures*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

¹⁰The problem of racial nomenclature is discussed below.

¹¹E Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool 1897-1963: A biography. BA Hons diss., University of Cape Town, 1978.

¹²G Paleker, Cissie Gool, Documentary film project towards MA Degree, University of Cape Town, forthcoming 2002.

¹³See, for instance, *Drum*, October 1954.

¹⁴See, for instance, *Argus*, 4 July 1963. See also *Cape Times*, 6 July 1963: 'When a Cape Town newspaper referred to her as the "Joan of Arc of the non-Whites", she remarked, "this lady is not for burning," and added "but I'll always burn with righteous indignation, because of man's inhumanity to man."

¹⁵*Drum*, October 1954.

¹⁶Amy Thornton, in conversation with the author, 10 April 2000.

by her constituency, the poor of District Six, whom she represented under the guise of 'Councillor Mrs Z Gool' for twenty five years. As Alie Fataar, leader in the Non-European Unity Movement, put it:

The community had a great respect for her, because she was a woman and no other woman, non-white, was a member of the Council. In that respect she was a pioneer.¹⁷

As a member of the Cape Town City Council, Cissie Gool became the first woman to be elected to the chair of the Health Committee, in 1949, and was responsible for the establishment of a dental clinic in the city.¹⁸ For more than twenty years, she participated in practically every political committee and spoke at almost every rally in Cape Town that called for the elimination of racist discrimination, and the protection or extension of black political, social and economic rights. Without fear of contradiction, an obituary in the *Cape Times* could state:

There was hardly an issue, political or otherwise, that has confronted the non-Europeans of Cape Town in particular from time to time, in which Mrs Gool has not taken a prominent part since 1930. Her name became a household word.¹⁹

As another obituary declared:

[Cissie Gool] not only entered the male-dominated arena of political and civic affairs; she stayed in it for more than 25 years and earned the respect of supporters and opponents alike for the vigorous and unswerving manner in which she fought for what she believed in.²⁰

What Cissie Gool believed in did not fit the mould of factionalism which characterised the left in the western Cape in the period of her leadership. She did not claim a rigid orthodox position within Communism or the opposing socialist position described as 'Trotskyism', associated with the Communist Party of South Africa and the Non-European Unity Movement respectively. Rather, she moved across boundaries, speaking on anti-racist platforms of both organisations, marching alongside her brother-in law Goolam Gool, a leader in the Unity Movement, and alongside Sam Kahn and other Communists. This was an extraordinary, if not unique, position to hold in the late 1930s and 1940s, given the extreme

¹⁷Alie Fataar, interviewed on video tape by Gairoonisa Paleker, for her Master's project, a documentary film about Cissie Gool, 2002. The tapes are lodged in the Centre for Popular Memory, University of Cape Town (not yet catalogued).

¹⁸See, for instance, *Guardian*, 30 August, 1951, and Cape Town Mayor's Minute, 1950.

¹⁹*Cape Times*, 6 July 1963.

²⁰*Cape Times*, 5 July 1963.

antipathy between the different factions on the left.²¹ Allison Drew points out that in the early 1930s, 'the Cape Town left retained some fluidity. There was still a degree of diversity and eclecticism amongst Cape Town socialists.'²² Cissie Gool's politics retained this fluidity into the later period; nothing in the literature explained this, which prompted me to look to earlier developmental factors.

Alie Fataar had mentioned that Cissie Gool's age was an important factor in setting her apart from the other young political activists of the period;²³ he pointed out that she was about fifteen years older than himself and his friends; I wanted to know what it was about this age difference that was significant. Fataar suggested that Cissie Gool had not had the kind of political education that he and his contemporaries had experienced. He felt that she had more in common with the ideological positions of the older, anti-colour bar tendency within Cape Town politics, and indeed the fight against the colour bar dominated her career. There was, however, more to it than this, as the thesis discusses.

I was drawn to the early life of Cissie Gool in particular, for several reasons. The first was her individualism, the fact that she was remembered as controversial, both politically and personally. Linked to this was the fact that very little is known historically of women's political work - however defined - in the western Cape.²⁴ In this sense the thesis does have a restorative motive. The wholesale rejection of such history is counterproductive. Because there is no historiographical tradition within South African feminist history of 'recuperating' women's lives, this work remains to be done: how it is done is crucial.²⁵ It is possible to

²¹See, for instance, A Drew, *Discordant comrades. Identities and loyalties on the South African Left*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, chapter 7, especially 138 ff.

²²*Ibid.*, 139.

²³Alie Fataar, leader in the Non-European Unity Movement, in conversation with the author, 22 September 2001. See also his videotaped interview with G Paleker, in which he makes the same point (G Paleker, 'Cissie Gool', videotaped interviews, Centre for Popular Memory, University of Cape Town).

²⁴See, for instance, C Walker, *The women's suffrage movement: The politics of gender, race and class*. In C Walker, ed. *Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1990, 315; C Walker, *Women and resistance in South Africa*, London: Onyx Press, 1982.

²⁵Simon Dagut fails to confront this issue in his rejection of 'recuperative' history, in an article which also makes the astonishing claim that '[i]t is now part of historians' common sense that it is vitally important to integrate the experiences, attitudes and actions of women into their narratives and analyses,' and that historians generally have taken Helen Bradford's 1996 historiographical critique seriously (S Dagut, *Gender, colonial 'women's history' and the construction of social distance: Middle-class British women in later nineteenth-century South Africa*. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26 (3) September 2000, 555). There are other significant gaps in this article. Dagut ignores historical work by both Bozzoli and Bradford, referring only to their historiographical analyses, and by other historians of women and gender, including myself. He also misnames Pamela Scully as Patricia. For a more accurate reflection of the state of South African

locate women's lives in the past without lionising them.²⁶ Until women have been located, it is difficult to see how more profound analyses may be conducted. This thesis cannot escape the fact that it is seeking Cissie Gool; any form of life writing must have a similar goal, before moving on. The intention is not to 'establish the objectivity of women's experiences',²⁷ but rather 'to point to the reformulations that need to be made when one takes women's lives seriously.'²⁸

Thirdly, Cissie Gool seemed to emerge from nowhere onto Cape Town's political scene, first appearing on platforms in 1930 and 1931, and then taking on the leadership of a new political organisation in December 1935. Historians are quick to note the fact that she was the daughter of Dr Abdurahman, leader of the African Political (later 'People's') Organisation. In every political history of the Western Cape in the first half of the twentieth century, where Cissie Gool is mentioned, she is introduced by reference to her father.²⁹ In the case of Gavin Lewis, this is not surprising, as Dr Abdurahman dominates a large part of his book on 'Coloured' politics.³⁰ But Abdurahman does not feature in Drew's history of South African socialism; nevertheless, she too considers this to be the important contextual 'fact' about Cissie Gool.³¹ On introducing Cissie Gool into her history of socialism, Drew frames her syntactically, on one side by her husband, on the other by her father.³² In none of the histories of politics in the western Cape, whether focused on ethnicity or ideology, is an explanation offered as to how and why Cissie Gool emerged as a leader. That she was her father's daughter, or her husband's wife, explains nothing.

historiography, see H Bradford, Women, gender and colonialism: Rethinking the history of the British Cape Colony and its frontier zones, c1806 - 70. *Journal of African History* 37 (1996), 351 - 370.

²⁶For an early discussion in a broader context, see G Lerner, Placing women in history: a 1975 perspective. In B A Carroll, ed. *Liberating women's history*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976, 237 - 361; J K Gadol, The social relation of the sexes: methodological implications of women's history. *Signs*, 4 (1976).

²⁷A Cornwall and N Lindisfarne, Dislocating masculinity. Gender, power and anthropology. In A Cornwall and N Lindisfarne, *Dislocating masculinity*, citing H Brod.

²⁸Lindsay Clowes, in conversation.

²⁹See, for instance, R E van der Ross, *The rise and decline of apartheid. A study of political movements among the coloured people of South Africa, 1880-1985*. Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1986 ; G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall: a history of South African 'Coloured' politics*, Cape Town: David Philip, 1987, 180; Drew, *Discordant comrades*, 179.

³⁰Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*.

³¹Ibid., 180. Both Lewis and Drew give the impression of more than one sibling, describing Cissie as Dr Abdurahman's youngest daughter.

³²Drew's first mention of Cissie Gool is in relation to her involvement in the launch of the Anti-Fascist League in 1935. She introduces her as: 'Dr Abdul Gool and his wife Zainunnissa 'Cissie' Gool, the youngest [sic]

Beyond my motivation to explore the seeming lack of evidence of Cissie Gool's early life, I was struck by the extent to which South African political biographies underestimate the significance of childhood, and of personal relationships, or 'the domestic', and gender. South African historians do not, on the whole, consider childhood worthy of historical study, and there is little recognition that every adult life, including that of a political leader, owes something to that person's experience of childhood. Equally, personal relationships - at any stage of political leader's life - tend to be ignored if they do not have narrowly conceived 'political' content. Frank Sulloway has argued that '[a]s the great forge of individual tendencies toward revolution and counterrevolution, the family is one of the foremost engines of historical change.'³³ South African historians have not engaged with this argument.

Children may well be the most marginalised people in South African historiography. There is little, if any, recognition within the literature of the significance of childhood, or its meanings, in South African history of the turn of the twentieth century. What has been said of philosophers is significant for the South African historiographical context:

Children have often been regarded ... as somewhat marginal people, whose activities and experiences matter less than those of adult - and especially male adult - human beings. ... their thoughts and deeds are weighed in the balance of 'grown up' standards and are found wanting.³⁴

However, as Geoffrey Scarre points out,

It is clearly true that childhood, like old age, is at a chronological margin of human life. That does not make children, or the elderly, marginal in a moral sense: they do not have a lesser worth than people we so question-beggingly refer to as being 'in the prime of life'.³⁵

Similarly, the marginalisation of children within societies does not render them inappropriate historical subjects, or their ideas, actions and development irrelevant, despite the facts that some historians believe that children 'lack political significance' because of

daughter of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman.' (Drew, *Discordant comrades*, 179. Her authority for most of the information she presents about Cissie is Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool).

³³F J Sulloway, *Born to rebel. Birth order, family dynamics, and creative lives*. London: Abacus, 1996, xviii.

³⁴G Scarre, Introduction. In G Scarre, ed. *Children, parents and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, ix.

³⁵Ibid, x.

their exclusion from the franchise.³⁶ Indeed, I would argue that an understanding of childhood, as a historical construct, is a requirement for understanding adult lives. It was this perspective that focused my attention on Cissie Gool's childhood.

Female childhood in particular has been poorly served historically. Phillipe Aries's early work set the stage for the recognition of the historical significance of families. His exploration of largely iconographic resources produced the conclusion that the concepts of 'family', and 'childhood', are inventions of modernity.³⁷ However, he did not distinguish between male and female children, or, rather, children were assumed to be generically male. The invisibility of girls is a thread that runs through the histories which built on, and critiqued, Aries' work.³⁸ Criticism of his work does not include a critique of his elision of girls.³⁹ The history of adolescence is no better served from the point of view of girls, than the more general histories of childhood. Indeed, according to Gillis, 'adolescence' was a construction which applied only to boys.⁴⁰ He does not provide an alternative schema of a female life cycle. There is little engagement with such issues in the revisionist South African historiography; there is, therefore, little interest in relationships within the family historically, including mother-daughter, father-daughter and sibling relationships.⁴¹ Within the South African literature, analyses of the political conceptualisation of 'motherism' have tended to gloss over 'on the ground' relationships with mothers, which in any case are far more difficult to identify than ideology.⁴² These analyses are important in understanding women's political choices, but are not concerned with looking at history from the point of

³⁶H Hendrick, *Children, childhood and English society, 1880 - 1990*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, 3.

³⁷P Ariès & R Baldick, *Centuries of childhood: a social history of family life*. New York, Random House, 1962.

³⁸The main objective of 'revisionist' historians was to demonstrate that Aries was wrong, and that 'the family' existed far earlier than Aries posited. See L Pollock, *Forgotten children. Parent-child relations from 1500 to 1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, introduction.

³⁹For just two examples, see *ibid* and L Jordanova, *Children in history: concepts of Nature and Society*. In Scarre, *Children, parents and politics*, 7.

⁴⁰J R Gillis, *Youth and history. Tradition and change in European age relations 1770 - present*. New York and London: Academic Press, 1974. His third chapter, entitled 'Boys will be boys' describes the 'discovery of adolescence, 1870 - 1900' and argues that adolescence became a stage in the life cycle of boys.

⁴¹Within western feminist biography, analyses of mother-child relationships generally follow N Chodorow, *The reproduction of mothering*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978. See also R Chopra, *Retrieving the father: gender studies, 'father love' and the discourse of mothering*. *Women's Studies International Forum* 24 (3/4) 2001, 445-455. See also L E Boose and B S Flowers, eds. *Daughters and fathers*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1989.

⁴²J Wells, *The rise and fall of motherism as a force in black women's resistance movements*. Paper presented at the Women and gender Conference, University of Natal, 1991.

view of children. The assumption that children are irrelevant in political and social history is widespread within the South African academy.

South African feminist historians have not taken up the challenge of exploring female childhoods historically. Feminists who take childhood and the family seriously find themselves in a double bind. As Belinda Bozzoli and Helen Bradford have pointed out, it is imperative that women-and-gender not be marginalised within the academy. Therefore, they argue for an analysis of how gender operates outside of 'the family'.⁴³ However, there is a place for historicising such constructs. For one thing, a focus on Cissie Gool's childhood and family has permitted a reading of men's politics that relied in part on particular constructions of childhood, of women and children, and men, within families. In other words, such an exploration allows the intimate relationship between the domestic and the public, and moves us beyond representing the political history of the western Cape - and, by extension, the country - as one between White and black men. It is historically commonplace that women were brought into the imperialist project; so too were black women expected to fulfil similar roles within what Dr Abdurahman conceived of as a Coloured nation.⁴⁴ These kinds of insights are only possible because I went searching for children and mothers. As June Hanmer put it, '[t]o bring women into social theory is to dislocate men from its centre. This process has epistemological ramifications that challenge positivism with its dualities of objectivity and subjectivity.'⁴⁵

Mainstream biographies of political leaders do not only underplay the significance of children, or childhood. Any form of domestic relationship is profoundly silenced, a rare exception being Stephen Clingman's study of Bram Fischer.⁴⁶ One immediate response to this is that in this case, Clingman, researching a highly educated, privileged member of the White South African elite, had access to a vast resource of private documents, mostly letters between Bram and his family, which permitted this kind of analysis or representation, which would not be possible for biographical research into black South African lives. Clingman's Fischer is profoundly influenced by his personal relationships with his wife and also with his

⁴³B Bozzoli, Marxism, feminism and South African studies. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 9 (2), April 1983, 171; Bradford, Women, gender and colonialism. See also P Hetherington, Women in South Africa: the historiography in English. *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 26 (2), 1993.

⁴⁴See Chapter Two.

⁴⁵Hanmer, Men power and the exploitation of women, 25.

⁴⁶S Clingman, *Bram Fischer: Afrikaner revolutionary*. Cape Town, Mayibuye Books, 1998.

children; to take two examples of political biographies of Cissie Gool's friends, Doreen Musson's Johnny Gomas and Brian Bunting's Moses Kotane are not.⁴⁷ In fact, they seem to have no personal relationships that do not directly impinge on their politics. An obvious distinction presents itself: it is easier to write about the private lives of people who have a tradition of letter-writing, and where such letters are valued and therefore preserved within family archives. The implication is that neither Gomas nor Kotane had such traditions, but this is not discussed in the biographies. This is not an evidential issue. Oral sources could be explored, and if nothing were discovered, questions could be asked. It is clear that for both Musson and Bunting, the domestic is irrelevant to political trajectories. Clingman has demonstrated the sterility of such a position, and also underlines the significance of the domestic for men (ie, not only for women), and permits an expanded understanding of what 'political' means.⁴⁸

In a fairly substantial field of 'revisionist' biography, there is a profound absence of life writing about women. To focus on the geographical and temporal location inhabited by Cissie Gool, of all possible subjects within mainstream politics in the western Cape from the 1930s to the 1950s, there is no academic biography of a woman. Even for later periods, this is true. This underlines the impression, either that such leaders did not exist, or that they are less worthy of biographical 'treatment' than their male counterparts. Thus, while academic biographies exist of Moses Kotane and Johnny Gomas (and a somewhat less academic biography of Jimmy La Guma), women leaders are relegated to the genre of popular struggle biography, where celebratory stories are told of their lives, but they are not taken seriously as academic subjects. Dora Tamana is a prime example of this; Bibi Dawood another.⁴⁹ Full

⁴⁷D Musson, *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the working class. A political biography*. Cape Town: buchu books, 1989, preface; B Bunting, *Moses Kotane: South African Revolutionary*. Cape Town: Mayibuye Books, 1998.

⁴⁸For a collection of essays rethinking traditional boundaries of 'politics' from women's perspectives, see, for instance, J M Bystydzienski, ed. *Women transforming politics. Worldwide strategies for empowerment*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University press, 1992.

⁴⁹Diana Russell's *Lives of Courage* presents short biographies of numerous women activists's struggles (D Russell, *Live of courage: Women for a new South Africa*. New York: Basic Books, 1995). The most prolific series of popular struggle biographies is 'They fought for freedom' (Maskew Miller). The series includes the following women, Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Ruth First, Dora Tamana, and the following men, Thabo Mbeki, Nelson Mandela, David Webster, James La Guma, Chris Hani, Mohandas Ghandi, Oliver Tambo, ZK Matthews, Yusuf Dadoo, Seretse Khama, Sol Plaatje and Steve Biko. Cissie Gool was earmarked to appear in this series, but did not appear in print. Another series, based in the western Cape, is that of the Mayibuye Library, edited by Andre Odendaal. See Z Jaffer, *The story of Bibi Dawood of Worcester*. Bellville: University of the Western Cape Historical and Cultural Centre, 1991. Unlike in the 'They fought for freedom' series, here the process of writing the story is foregrounded, and the subject becomes an active participant in the process. As Jaffer puts it: 'I needed to tell her story. I needed to understand how a woman from a conservative Indian

length biographies exist of Winne Mandela, but her life awaits critical historical analysis.⁵⁰ Western Cape biographies tend to be written about leaders within the Communist Party: all three men referred to above were members at one time or another (Kotane and Gomas were also leaders in the African National Congress). Within this tradition, it is extraordinary that no biography has been written of Ray Alexander, who was a member of the Western Cape District Party Committee, at one time its secretary, and whose influence on other leaders such as Moses Kotane was significant.⁵¹

Thus far, this discussion has not critiqued the notion of 'political', yet the importance of expanding the notion of political to include the work that most women do is recognised.⁵² However, this does not mean that one should not investigate those women who did inhabit the world of formal politics, as conceived, dominated and to a large extent recorded by men. A critical eye cast over this field allows one to expand the notion of 'politics' beyond party and ideology, to examine the location and interstices of power within a life. As South African political biographies stand, sex is taboo. Sections on childhood are very short, and 'real politics' only begins with adulthood, and the influence of those who are considered more politically sophisticated. Thus, Moses Kotane, Johnny Gomas, Jimmy La Guma - to mention men with whom Cissie Gool associated - have no homes to speak of, no families (or none worth more than a mere mention), no relationships other than those in the public work of political activism.⁵³

background could have risen to the prominence she did in this rural town in the Cape. She sat down and replied to my letter.' (Ibid., 7.)

⁵⁰N Harrison, *Winnie Mandela: Mother of a nation*. London: Victor Gollancz, 1985; S Goulds, *Winnie Mandela*. London: Hamilton, 1988.

⁵¹It has been left to Ray Alexander to tell her own story, which she has tried to do for more than twenty years. As noted below, the genre of women's autobiography is a fertile field within South African life writing. However, the problems Ray encountered in finding the funding to write her own story resulted in her attempting to write at an advanced age, when her memory was no longer sharp. In my opinion, it is profoundly disturbing for her to have given countless interviews over decades, to countless academics who 'culled' what they wanted from her life, with no historian being interested in writing her story. This despite the fact that an enormous archive exists, most of which has been donated to the University of Cape Town. With the support of Iris Berger, the Centre for Popular Memory at the University of Cape Town, and the Ford Foundation, funding was raised for the taping and writing (and, because of infirmity, ghost-writing) of her story.

⁵²H Afshar, ed. *Women and politics in the Third World*. London: Routledge, 1996; J Allen, Evidence and silence: feminism and the limits of history. In C Pateman and E Gross, eds. *Feminist challenges. Social and political theory*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986; Bystydzienski, *Women transforming politics*.

⁵³Bunting, *Moses Kotane*; Adhikari, *Jimmy La Guma*; Musson, *Johnny Gomas*.

To take just one example, Doreen Musson's biography of Johnny Gomas aims to 'examine the role and contribution of Johnny Gomas to the national liberation movement.'⁵⁴ She is at pains to point to the commonality of Gomas' mother with other black South African women:

Elizabeth's hopes and ambitions show a parallel with those of thousands of South Africans pushed off the land by the expansion of capital in the countryside and pulled towards the cities and towns. Her industry, pride and resoluteness would drive her son to perform well at everything he undertook. Her powerful influence over Gomas has been stressed by one of Gomas's closest friends.⁵⁵

Practically nothing more is said of Gomas' home life, or the influences of his childhood, which was cut short by the need for him to leave school and be 'thrown into the ranks of the working class which was increasingly being generated by the developing capitalist system.'⁵⁶ The chapter on Gomas' youth ends with the statement: 'The ten years in Kimberley had transformed Gomas from a child into an adult and had also converted him to a rebel with a cause'. The significant influences on this political leader in the making had little, if anything, to do with personal relationships or childhood, everything to do with broader processes of capital development. The rest of his life is represented in these terms. He has a home - we know that because it was where 'he was doing tailoring privately'.⁵⁷

Placing great value on the underplayed elements in South African political biography and political histories more generally, I decided to explore the origins of the intriguing popular leader 'Mrs Z Gool'. I wanted to seek the origins of her politics which set her apart from others in her political milieu. In the course of the research, I soon came to see the value of Michel Foucault's distinction between 'origins' and 'beginnings'.⁵⁸ A determined search for causality threatened to force the evidence into a linear narrative of 'development', meaning 'progress', which was not justified by the evidence itself. In this thesis, I do not fully resolve this tension, but I try to draw attention to the artificial nature of historical narrative at various points, not least in the chosen periodisation, the search for turning points. I realised

⁵⁴Musson, *Johnny Gomas*, preface.

⁵⁵Ibid., 14.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 30.

this story is not less worthy of being told if it is, as Karel Schoeman described his rendition of a particular episode of the early life of Olive Schreiner, like a sieve full of holes.⁵⁹ The holes themselves allow for further exploration, further reflection.

A question running through this thesis is how women, and even famous, highly educated, articulate, middle class, women in the public gaze, fall through the cracks of history. This study highlights some of the many layers of what one might term 'mysgynopia', a failure to see women, that prevents questions about women being asked in the first place, and that has profound implications in terms of beliefs about what constitutes appropriate, valid, evidence. It is a commonplace in South African historiography that primary sources are biased in terms of race and of class, and need to be interrogated on that basis, but this thesis foregrounds the analysis of androcentric distortions of primary sources. As this study underscores, this does not consist merely of sexism in the representation of women in traditional sources (although this is part of the problem),⁶⁰ but also in the silences in these sources: the exclusion of women from the discourses of men who were writing for other men. This exclusion does not only take place at the level of the archive produced by the state, or the 'public', but is also imbricated in writings in, and about, the domestic.⁶¹

This thesis highlights two neglected aspects of South African historical scholarship, childhood and the domestic, or personal relationships within and beyond 'the family', and links them to a discourse around gender that privileges men. The challenge was to proceed in the absence of substantial personal, private documents such as diaries, journals, letters, to

⁵⁸P O'Brien, Michel Foucault's history of culture. In L Hunt, ed. *The new cultural history*. Berkeley: University of California, 1999, 37.

⁵⁹K Schoeman, *Olive Schreiner: A woman in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1991, 347.

⁶⁰For instance, see Yvette Abrahams' analyses of eighteenth and early nineteenth century representations of Khoisan bodies, especially that of Sara Baartman (Y Abrahams, *Creating the 'native': A comparative study of travel writing in Canada and South Africa*. Paper presented at Gender and Colonialism Conference, University of the Western Cape, 1997; Y Abrahams, *Images of Sara Bartman: Sexuality, race and gender in early nineteenth century Britain*. In R Pierson and N Chaudhuri, eds. *Nation, empire, colony: Historicising gender and race*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998; Y Abrahams. *The great national insult: Science, sexuality and the Khoisan in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century*. Paper presented at the 15th Biennial Conference of the South African Historical Society, held at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 1995; Y Abrahams, *Disempowered to consent: Sara Bartman and Khoisan slavery in the nineteenth-century Cape Colony and Britain*. *South African Historical Journal*, 35 (1996).).

⁶¹The word 'imbricate' is used here to emphasise the need to be wary of the many-layered quality of silence and silencing within primary documents. For the present thesis, these records include private collections, specifically those of Louis Herrman and Harry Snitcher, and the published memoirs of Lancelot Hogben and Eddie Roux (A Hogben, ed. *Lancelot Hogben: Scientific humanist. An unauthorised autobiography*.

seek the domestic in more public forms of discourse, and to challenge any claim to 'no evidence'. I could do this for the life of Cissie Gool, because it was clear to me that there must be evidence, because she was famous and had a more famous father. And the place to start in looking for this evidence, was with that man. Evidence of him must, I felt, contain evidence of the private life of a public figure, even if that evidence was microscopic; evidence of Abdullah Abdurahman necessarily pointed in some way, I assumed, to his wife and to his daughters.

And so it did. Indeed, in trying to find out something about Cissie Abdurahman's childhood, I found myself examining conventional historical evidence. Newspapers have a very secure place as primary sources, and I used the *APO* in very conventional ways. The *APO* was the official organ of the African Political Organisation (APO), and Cissie's father presided over both. It was possible for Gavin Lewis to write a history of APO politics in the period covering Cissie's childhood, without mentioning women's political work, let alone children, and without reflecting on their significance for the organisation.⁶² I merely focused the lens on different parts of the page, notably the 'women's columns', or different aspects of reports and found both women as political actors, and children, in the pages of a men's political newspaper. One simply has to shift perspective a little, to apply the lens to a different part of the page and read the 'irrelevant' columns, such as those labelled 'Amusements'. One has to take seriously that which has been ignored in mainstream political histories: the 'cultural' events and fund-raisers as well as the more overt political and ideological content of presidential speeches and editorials. The story of women in relation to male-dominated organisations will be partial, but there is enough in the pages of the *APO* to demonstrate a presence, to analyse that presence, and to demonstrate not only how the paper, and therefore the Organisation, and therefore Dr Abdurahman, constructed women, but also how women engaged with such illusions. It became clear that the ethos of the APO was partly built on particular ways of seeing, and moulding, children and women: so the evidence was there, refracted through the imagination of Cissie Gool's father, who dominated the organisation, and the newspaper.

Woodbridge: Merlin Press, 1998; UCT M&A: BC 1161: Harry Snitcher collection; UCT M&A: BC 695: Louis Herrman collection; E and W Roux, *Rebel Pity. The life of Eddie Roux*. London: Rex Collings, 1970).

⁶²G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall: a history of South African 'Coloured' politics*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987. This is the major history of APO politics, and 'Coloured' politics more broadly, focusing on the pre-apartheid era (although the final chapter does discuss this). A less well-known work which covers similar ground is R E van der Ross, *The rise and decline of apartheid*.

As leader of the African Political Organisation, Dr Abdurahman spear-headed a campaign of what might be termed 'social engineering' within the community of District Six, targeted particularly at those identified, or who were identified as 'non-European', or 'Coloured'. This project depended in a profound way on the shaping of women and children, and therefore it is possible to trace Dr Abdurahman's vision of the perfect family, through his public pronouncements on the duties of women on the one hand, and those images of families, and of children, which he projected in the pages of the *APO*. I could simply have reflected the childhood of Cissie Gool as it was itself reflected through a newspaper which depended on this particular construction of the children of its leaders. But this was no mere reflection, but a refraction, as the 'children' captured in these pages were no straightforward mirror images of girls and boys in District Six. Yet there were tiny shreds of evidence containing sufficient of the young girl's self-reflection, to in some way question the *APO*'s perfect daughters. So the 'truth' about Cissie when she did not project the image required by her father is not evident in the pages of the *APO*, except through Cissie's and Rosie's creative writing. This provided an ironic commentary on the Abdurahman family and the *APO* imagined community, in inverting the 'normal' order in various ways, as the thesis explores.

In this study, the early adulthood of Zainonesa (Cissie) Abdurahman, who became Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, is explored through a variety of lenses. The first is the unquestionably sound body of evidence lodged in huge volumes in the University of Cape Town archives. Here one could apply completely conventional historical detective methods, and produce a solid history of 'Cissie's studies at UCT'. This threatened to seduce me into ignoring the more difficult and controversial use to which I put my historical imagination. I sought to explore aspects of a life that were hidden within the primary sources themselves. Careful analysis of hints contained in oral sources and androcentric memoirs opened windows onto some of the circles with which Cissie Gool associated in her young adulthood. Oral sources were invaluable for the more straightforward reconstruction of certain aspects of her family life, largely through the eyes of her surviving son, who very generously shared many memories via E-mail and telephonically. Cissie Gool's surviving sister in law, Amina Gool, similarly provided insights into the person Cissie Gool, and it was she who provided the first hints of Cissie's friendships with the University of Cape

Town intellectuals in the late 1920s. Without her clues, it would have been nigh impossible to discover these relationships, as documentary primary sources are largely silent. Further hints were provided by Elizabeth Everett's honours dissertation, a biography of Cissie Gool.⁶³ Whereas there are various factual errors in her text, it was extremely useful for pointing me towards the people she interviewed for her study.⁶⁴ For instance, Zelda Friedlander, a writer, is the only individual I have been able to link with Cissie, whose personal papers do contain valuable information about Cissie and her mother.⁶⁵ Everett also interviewed Louis Herrman (Zelda's brother-in-law), who studied at the University of Cape Town with Cissie. His personal papers contain no reference to Cissie; without his inclusion in Everett's study, his friendship with Cissie Gool would not have been identified.⁶⁶ The study highlights the profound bias within private personal collections, in as much as the people with whom individuals correspond, and about whom people write, remain as traces in documents. Others, with whom one associates orally, or whose correspondence is considered of minor interest to whoever compiles the collection, are easily lost, even though such people might have been of the most profound significance. Issues of androcentricity and other forms of prejudice in such selection must be considered.

The published memoirs used for this study are those of Lancelot Hogben and Eddie Roux, supplemented by the use of Baruch Hirson's *Cape Town intellectuals*.⁶⁷ Analysis of all three sources is complicated by the fact that they are all posthumous publications, and it is unclear how far those who took control of the manuscripts shaped the final text. It is impossible, therefore, to account for the silencing of Cissie in parts of the text, and why she has been represented in particular ways when she does appear. Cissie's contentious position in the context of publication under apartheid might have played a role in her almost (but not quite) total absence from Roux's and Hogben's memoirs. It does not explain why Hirson's account ignores her, when her friendship with Ruth Alexander, and with many others mentioned in *Cape Town Intellectuals*, is beyond question. Nevertheless, together these texts provide a rich source for an analysis of the intellectual circles associated with the University of Cape

⁶³E Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool 1897 - 1963: A biography. BA Honours diss., University of Cape Town, 1978.

⁶⁴Her 'facts' have been taken as authoritative in later histories which mention Cissie, including A Drew, *Discordant comrades. Identities and loyalties on the South African Left*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000.

⁶⁵UCT M&A: BC 580, Zelda Friedlander collection.

⁶⁶Louis Herrman collection.

Town, in which Cissie moved in the late 1920s. Oral sources pointed to her associations; the written sources provided insights into the meanings of those associations.

This thesis was constructed within an academic department which, in the course of the research, transformed itself from a 'History Department', a relic of positivism, to a more open department of 'Historical Studies'. This thesis happily claims a place as not a history - let alone 'the' history - of Cissie Gool, but as an historical study of aspects of her life. It simultaneously foregrounds the process whereby one may reflect, and reflect on, a life that at first glance, appears to have left very few traces.⁶⁸ It follows conventional biographical and historical methods of research and analysis, although in some ways I may stretch these methods. It presents a more or less conventional chronological narrative, seeking to demonstrate the historian's art of tracing change over time. However, it does not attempt to construct the sense of narrative closure and completeness which is generally associated with biographical studies. A chronological narrative from (or before) birth to death presents the illusion of closure, of completeness.⁶⁹ Ending my story where Cissie Gool first enters most other histories aims to avoid this delusion.⁷⁰

This thesis rejects any pretension to objectivity. I recognise that there are many ways of seeing and telling Cissie Gool's stories, and that many other forces than those I identify influenced her political development. My personal interest in listening to women's silences and women's histories, my belief in the centrality of gender and the need for self-reflexivity in the academy, my personal political imperative to highlight and critique androcentric

⁶⁷Roux, *Rebel pity*, Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*, B Hirson, *The Cape Town intellectuals: Ruth Schechter and her circle, 1907-1934*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001.

⁶⁸Although a great deal of western feminist biography relies on rich documentary sources, for an exception, see L Chambers-Schiller, The value of female public rituals for feminist biography: Maria Weston Chapman and the Boston anti-slavery anniversary, *a/b: Auto/ Biography Studies* 8, 2 (Fall 1993). Thanks to Prof Lora Lempert for locating this edition for me, which was not available in South Africa.

⁶⁹The debate about narrative form, whether applied to biography or autobiography, was the subject of discussion among western feminists in the 1980s, but has not become part of debates within mainstream historical practice at the University of Cape Town. Unfortunately, the establishment of a separate institute for 'women's and gender studies' has been partly responsible for mainstream historians' continued avoidance of feminist issues. The physical location of the African Gender Institute, which teaches 'women and gender' courses on a separate campus has intensified the separation between 'history' and 'women's and gender' studies. At the University of the Western Cape, on the other hand, the two departments are forced to interact daily, being located within the same physical space.

⁷⁰Within the South African canon, see K Schoeman, *Irma Stern: the early years, 1894-1933*. Cape Town: South African Library, 1994; K Schoeman, *Olive Schreiner: A woman in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1991.

history, and my personal experiences as a student at the University of Cape Town, have shaped the project.⁷¹

In negotiation with advisors' recommendations and some reluctance to have me intrude upon the text, this is a story as much of the process of writing a life of a black South African woman who has left few traces, as it is a story of that life. The footnotes have, in part, become my compromise, and their location at the foot of every page, rather than at the end of chapters or the thesis itself, points to a partially contained authorial presence, which nevertheless insinuates itself into the text, literally departing from the footnotes where it feels the need to draw attention to the frailty and contestability of the 'facts' selected and collated to represent this particular view of a life. My inability to tie down many of the facts that would permit a neat periodisation, and a seamless narrative of causality, of origins, freed me to highlight not only the difficulties of 'compiling sufficient facts' to write a life, but also the fictive imperative in historical and biographical writing.⁷²

Racial nomenclature is a contentious issue in South African historiography, as it is in South African society. It played so large a part in framing the lives of the people in this study, that it is important to clarify my use of racial labels. Firstly, the study attempts to highlight the fact that 'race and gender are absolutely inseparable ... the construction of one depends upon the other.'⁷³ To be a black girl or a black woman in District Six at the turn of the twentieth

⁷¹For examples of my published work that reflects these feminist concerns, see P van der Spuy, Gender and Slavery: Towards a Feminist Revision, *South African Historical Journal* 25 (1991); P van der Spuy, Slave Women and the Family in Cape Town in the Nineteenth Century, *South African Historical Journal* 27 (1992), P van der Spuy, "Making himself master": Galant's rebellion revisited, *South African Historical Journal* 34 (1996); S Burman, and P van der Spuy, The illegitimate and the illegal in a South African city: the effects of apartheid on births out of wedlock, *Journal of Social History*, 29, 3 (March 1996); P van der Spuy, 'What, then, was the sexual outlet for black males?': A feminist critique of demographic representations of women slaves at the Cape of Good Hope in the Eighteenth Century, *Kronos*, 23 (Nov 1996); P van der Spuy, Silencing race and gender?: the 1997 conference on gender and colonialism. Conference review of University of the Western Cape Conference on Gender and Colonialism, January 1997, *South African Historical Journal* 37 (1998); P van der Spuy, Gendered resistance. Meanings of freedom in the Bokkeveld rebellion, South Africa, 1825. In P Scully and D Paton, eds. *Gender and Slave Emancipation in the Atlantic World*, Boston: Duke, forthcoming 2002; and P van der Spuy, Infanticide and the politics of reproduction in a slave society: the Cape of Good Hope, c.1820. In M Jackson, ed., *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on child murder and its concealment, 1550 -2000*. UK: Ashgate, 2002.

⁷²See L S Kramer, Literature and historical imagination. In Hunt, *New cultural history*; D La Capra, *Rethinking intellectual history: Texts, contexts, language*. New York: Ithaca, 1983; P Lalu, Lived texts, written texts and con-texts: Eddie Roux and the making of the South African past. M A Diss., University of the Western Cape, 1994.

⁷³A Ferber, *White man falling: Race, gender and white supremacy*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999, 119.

century had very particular meanings that were different from, but contingent on, meanings of boyhood and manhood, and vice versa. Secondly, as Mohamed Adhikari has noted:

Historical writing on the coloured community of South Africa has tended to accept coloured identity as given and to portray it as fixed. The failure to take cognizance of the fluidity of coloured self-definition and the ambiguities inherent in the process has resulted in South African historiography presenting an over-simplified image of the phenomenon.⁷⁴

Adhikari points out that '[r]ecent mainstream academic writing shares the traditional premise that coloured identity is something negative and undesirable but tries to blame it on the racism of whites.'⁷⁵ This study underlines the impact of apartheid on South African historiography, specifically in terms of the histories of 'coloured' and 'Indian' politics. These histories are written as if, as Adhikari suggests, racial categories were fixed and separate. The presence of Dr Abdurahman in both histories has not alerted the writers to the ambiguities and fluidity of racial identity which Adhikari underlines.⁷⁶

Similarly, the lives of Cissie Gool, her mother, her father and her husband underline in the strongest terms the ambiguities of racial classification and identity within District Six in the early years of the twentieth century. Cissie's mother, Nellie Abdurahman, was a White British immigrant who married Abdullah Abdurahman, a man of Indian ancestry, who came to play a crucial role in shaping a community which identified as coloured. Nellie was coloured when she led the African Political Organisation Women's Guild (which was restricted to female coloured membership), and White when she took tea at Stuttford's in the late 1940s and 1950s, after the apartheid government had legislated for absolute White supremacy. Abdullah was Indian when he courted Nellie, and when he led delegations to India in the mid-1920s, but he was coloured when he led the African Political Organisation. Cissie's future husband, Abdul Hamid Gool's parents were Indian, from India, and he was coloured when he joined the APO. At one stage in her life, Cissie claimed to be Malay, but

⁷⁴M Adhikari, 'The product of civilization in its most repellent manifestation': Ambiguities in the racial perceptions of the APO (African Political Organization), 1909 - 23. *Journal of African History*, 38 (1997), 283.

⁷⁵Ibid., 285.

⁷⁶See, for instance, Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*; S Bhana, and B Pachai, *A documentary history of Indian South Africans, 1862 - 1982*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1984; B Pachai, *The international aspects of the South African Indian Question 1860-1971*. Cape Town: C Struik, 1971.

also stood apart from Malay identity when she wrote articles for the *Cape Times* about ‘them’.

I initially inserted inverted commas before and after every racial category, from ‘white’ to ‘black’, but in negotiation with supervisors, dropped the ‘so-called’ label, which was found to be distracting (which in itself was not a bad thing). It is striking that the word ‘white’ is not generally highlighted in texts which problematise racial categories, although it is just as constructed a category.⁷⁷ It was important that racial nomenclature be highlighted as artificial in whatever form it appeared. In some instances in the text I felt I could not avoid inverted commas as for example, with the term ‘Malay’, or when it is essential to highlight the artificiality of the construct. For the rest, contemporary racial terms are capitalised, but the word ‘black’ is used in its current sense, to collectively refer to those who were discriminated against in South African society, in racial terms. Within quotations, however, I have not altered nomenclature, or grammar, or spelling. Each quotation, therefore carries an invisible [sic].

Other than issues of race, two more concerns plagued this study. One was how to avoid a ‘chummy’ or patronising tone in referring to my subject. It was impossible to use only surnames, because there were numerous Gools and Abdurahmans. I found the use of both given name and surname cumbersome, and in the end decided to use first names when the context was personal, and more formal names if the context required it. Thus, this may be the only history to refer to Cissie’s father as ‘Abdullah’; no disrespect is intended by referring to women, or to men, in these terms. Where I refer to Cissie’s mother’s political work, I try to call her either Mrs Abdurahman or Nellie Abdurahman, but at home she was Nellie. The same goes for Cissie Gool herself.

The final issue threatened, at one stage, to jettison the project. Feminist biographer Liz Stanley abandoned her research on the ‘Yorkshire Ripper’ when his wife indicated to her that she felt that Stanley was intruding on her privacy in the same manner as the press had

⁷⁷See, for instance Adhikari, ‘The product’, 284. As James Baldwin put it, in the context of American colonialism, ‘America became white – the people who, as they claim, “settled” the country became white – because of the necessity of denying the Black presence, and justifying the Black subjugation.’ (J Baldwin, *On Being White and Other Lies*. In J Helfand and L Lippin, eds. *Understanding Whiteness/ unravelling racism*. Cincinnati: Thomson Learning Custom Publishing, 2001, 30.

done.⁷⁸ Although I did not face precisely this issue, I did have to confront the problem that my concerns differed in many ways from those of the people who agreed to speak to me. There were two main obstacles: the concern that I was going to write about Cissie Gool in such a way as to cause trauma to her remaining relatives, and the issue of her personal life. Most of the people interviewed, either by myself, or by Gairoonisa Paleker for her documentary film on Cissie Gool, refused to discuss her private life 'on the record'. For many people, Cissie Gool's relationship with Sam Kahn was still considered scandalous, and definitely not the province of history. As a feminist historian, of course the domestic and the private is of central importance, so when people refused to speak to me about these issues, or insisted that I kept them out of the work, I considered whether I could write a valuable history without them. In the end, I decided to try. I was very fortunate to be able to meet both Cissie's sister-in-law, Amina Gool, and her son, Rustum (if only electronically), both of whom were very generous. In chatting with Rustum over the telephone, he assured me that I could make use of anything he told me about his mother. I have tried to walk a line between sensitivity to the requests of people who so generously gave their time and their memories, and my own requirements as a feminist historian. In the end, some things did not need to be said, and I hope I have dealt sufficiently sensitively with others.

The thesis is divided into two main sections. The first three chapters focus on Cissie Gool's antecedents and childhood, while the last three explore her adult life until the moment when she took on the leadership of the National Liberation League of South Africa, and embarked on a life of political activism. Over the thesis as a whole there is, therefore, a broadly chronological progression. However, imposed on this framework is the analysis of different themes, or 'circles of influence.'

The first chapter provides a brief overview of Cissie Gool's ancestors, focusing on her paternal ancestors because their lives, as former slaves and as Muslims in Cape Town, played a significant role in setting the framework of her own life in District Six. I trace her parents' courtship, and their early lives as a married couple in District Six at the end of the nineteenth century. The births of the Abdurahman daughters are then discussed in this context.

⁷⁸Stanley, *The autobiographical 'I'*.

The second and third chapters reflect on the character of raced and gendered childhood and adolescence in District Six, and explore influences on Cissie Abdurahman, conceived as intersecting circles of influence, spreading out from Albert Lodge, Cissie's home. I argue that Cissie's family was most significant in forming her personality and outlook, always within the wider milieu of District Six, under the umbrella of the African Political Organisation. I also highlight some of the silences in the *APO*, which constructed very particular images of ideal children. Cissie and her sister Rosie's creative writing is also explored for clues to some of the silences in the *APO*'s representation.

I suggest that as a young child, Cissie was more Nellie's than Abdullah's daughter. The argument does not draw on psychoanalysis, but posits that the gendered structures of the family and of public politics within this particular community, meant that Cissie would spend much of her childhood in the company of her mother. Her mother had the primary responsibility of 'bringing up' her children, and the frequent absences of her father on political business exacerbated this influence. This is a major focus of the second chapter.

The third chapter explores aspects of Cissie's life between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one. Apart from the argument that this period of her life differed in important ways from her earlier childhood, the evidential record for 1911 - 1913 differs from that for the earlier part of her life, in significant ways. Three examples of Cissie's writing exist, making it possible to gain a unique insight into how she represented this phase of her life. Cissie's writing, both personal and for public consumption, provides information about her psychological development, and also about her political perspective as a young adolescent. In addition, the *APO* continued to record some of Cissie's activities, and reveals important processes not clear from Cissie's autography. It is for these years that relatively rich documentary evidence exists to allow an intimate insight into Cissie's worlds. These chapters adopt a chronological framework within which various circles of influence overlap and interact over time, within the universal set of District Six and the *APO* (read Dr Abdurahman)-dominated community.

The second part of the thesis explores Cissie's adult life from 1918, when she first registered at the University of Cape Town, to 1935, when she took on the leadership of the National Liberation League of South Africa. Again, these chapters are broadly chronological, but do intersect as particular themes are discussed in different chapters. Chapter Four traces

Cissie's first experience of the University of Cape Town, her marriage to Abdul Hamid Gool, the birth of her children, and her early engagement with 'Indian' politics which dominated the Gool family in the 1920s.

Chapter Five focuses on a transitional moment in Cissie Gool's young adult life. Around the end of the 1920s, her parents' family disintegrated, and so did her marriage, although no neat periodisation is possible, as I have been unable to pin-point the date when Dr Abdurahman left Nellie Abdurhman, or when Cissie Gool moved out of 48 Searle Street. Nevertheless, these family dynamics were significant for Cissie Gool's personal-political development, even if no causal links can be identified. This chapter also examines evidence that suggests that Cissie Gool was not yet radicalised by 1928, and that the process of her radicalisation began from that time. She became friendly with intellectual circles at the University of Cape Town, and this chapter examines the heterodoxy of these circles, as she continued with her studies.

The final chapter traces Cissie Gool's political and educational trajectory from 1930, when she joined her parents in protesting against the enfranchisement of White women, which was rightly seen as a device to reduce the power of the black vote in the Cape. Cissie Gool made her first public political appearance in 1930, and again in 1931, but then returned to her studies until she achieved her Master's degree. In this period she also became increasingly involved in circles outside of the University, most notably with members of the Communist Party of South Africa, including, but not limited to, Sam Kahn, a young Jewish law graduate who became Cissie's life partner for some years. Although Sam was clearly an important influence on Cissie's life, there is practically no evidence to even link them before 1934; certainly from 1935 they began to appear on political platforms together. Their relationship is not explored in any depth in this study, as the thesis ends in 1935, when Cissie Gool agreed to take on the Presidentship of the newly-formed National Liberation League of South Africa.

This thesis challenges accepted assumptions within the historical discipline concerning the use and meanings of primary sources, but including the truism that an accumulation of sources *necessarily* represents a closer approximation to truth than fewer sources can do (although of course I do recognise that the greater the number of sources, the more the

Chapter One

Ancestors of Zainonesa Abdurahman, a 'princess' of District Six

A life begins long before it starts, emerging from other lives before returning to them again. When it emerges it does so out of a current of time that long preceded it and continues on its way with scarcely a ripple long after.¹

Zainonesa Abdurahman was born in Albert Lodge, 7 Mount Street, off Castle Bridge, on the edge of District Six, Cape Town, in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Her life's trajectories must be traced to the context into which she was born, to the traditions of the families of both parents and to the history of the community in which her life began. This chapter seeks to understand something of the forces that emerged from the 'current of time that long preceded' Zainonesa's birth, which would shape the framework of her life.

Zainonesa Abdurahman was the younger daughter of Nellie and Abdullah Abdurahman, a young Muslim couple who epitomised the heterogeneous character of the small, vibrant, but heavily overcrowded District Six, located on the periphery of central Cape Town at the turn of the twentieth century.² Their house itself was located on the margins of District Six. Nellie was a recent Scottish immigrant, having converted to Islam and married a Capetonian Muslim who had been studying in her home town, Glasgow. Abdullah had recently graduated from Glasgow University, and on his and Nellie's arrival in Cape Town, had immediately registered as a medical doctor, and set about ministering to the needs of the local black community.³ While in Scotland, he had met Helen Potter James, universally known as Nellie, and her father, who was campaigning for free and compulsory education for Scottish children. Her mother's activities are not known. Abdullah warned Nellie that life in Cape Town would be unlike anything she had yet experienced. She later recalled that,

¹S Clingman, *Bram Fischer: Afrikaner revolutionary*. Cape Town: David Philip and Mayibuye Books, University of the Western Cape, 1998, 1.

²S Jeppie and C Soudien, eds. *The struggle for District Six: past and present*. Cape Town: buchu books, 1990; V Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic pride and racial prejudice in Victorian Cape Town: group identity and social practice, 1875 - 1902*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

³*The Medical and Pharmacy Register for the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope*, vol III (July 1894 - June 1895).

when Abdullah had asked her to marry him, he had 'warned her of the difficulties that lay ahead as the Scottish wife of an Indian medical practitioner in South Africa, where racial problems and prejudices were much to the fore'⁴

Cape society was increasingly being divided along racial lines, but Abdullah believed that nineteenth century liberal principles still applied here. He would stake his political future on the principle that liberalism, clothed in notions of 'civilisation', could overcome racial prejudice. He chose to marry a British middle class woman, committed to a life of community service, who agreed to convert to Islam. Nellie embarked on a journey into the unknown. She would never prove to be a devotee of Islam, but neither would she renounce her adopted religion, and would commit the rest of her life to the promotion of education for all South African children, and the care of the Capetonian poor. A woman who later claimed she 'never saw black or white, but only people', she devoted her adult life to a society in which race defined every aspect of every life, including that of her 'mixed race' children, her 'Coloured' (sometimes 'Indian') husband, and herself.⁵ Nellie chose to become a member of a black community, but could 'pass for White' when she wanted to take tea at Stuttaford's; her daughters were denied access to such establishments.⁶ Their outrage at racist discrimination would frame the rest of their lives.

Nellie, Abdullah and their two daughters, like every other person in Cape Town, lived their lives intersected by issues of race, class, religion and gender. The politics of race intersecting with class and religion would frame their lives; the politics of gender would define their lived experience within that framework. Zainonesa (later spelt Zainunnissa) - known from a very young age as Cissie - was more than simply the younger daughter of Dr Abdurahman: she was also a daughter of District Six. In this multifaceted context, her parents, and their ancestors, provided the framework for the transmutation of Zainonesa Abdurahman into Councillor Mrs Z Gool, champion of the poor of District Six.

⁴Nellie Abdurahman, interviewed by Zelda Friedlander, *Spotlight* 12 March 1948, copy in University of Cape Town, Manuscripts and Archives (hereafter UCT M&A): BC 580, Zelda Friedlander papers.

⁵Nellie used these words during her election campaign to the Cape Town City Council in 1928. See *Cape Times*, 11 July 1928; UCT M&A: BC 506, Waradea Abdurahman papers, A1.3: Open letter to rate-payers, 12 December 1928.

⁶Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001.

Cissie's mother was one of many British women to emigrate to South Africa in the late nineteenth century. Unlike many, however, who came as single, working class women, looking for work or husbands, Nellie arrived in Cape Town, renamed 'Wahida' (a name she never used), already married to a black, Muslim Capetonian professional, Abdullah Abdurahman.⁷ From the beginning, her presence here was overtly political. Little is known of Nellie's youth. She was born in Scotland in 1877,⁸ the only daughter of Harriet (born Stout)⁹ and her husband, John Cumming James, a Glasgow solicitor who 'had helped to secure free and compulsory education for Scottish children'.¹⁰ Nellie would many years later recall that:

As a young girl, she spent her summer holidays in Forfar, and played in the neighbouring gardens of Glamis, the home of the Earl and Countess Strathmore, the parents of our present queen.¹¹

Nellie's family was part of Glasgow's 'substantial and powerful professional group'.¹² The influence of her mother is impossible to determine, as no evidence has been located concerning her, apart from her name. However, something is known of Nellie's father, who campaigned for free and compulsory education for poor Scottish children. R E van der Ross has suggested: 'this sense of social responsibility showed in his daughter, for Mrs Nellie Abdurahman became a campaigner for the rights of the under-privileged in South Africa.'¹³ In her welfare and suffrage work, Nellie reflected the politics of other British - and

⁷See, for instance, C Swaisland, *Servants and gentlewomen to the golden land. The emigration of single women from Britain to southern Africa, 1820 - 1939*. Oxford: Berg, 1993; M Strobel, *European women and the second British empire*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991; M Strobel, Gender and race in the nineteenth and twentieth century British Empire. In R Bridenthall, C Koonz and S Stuard, eds. *Becoming visible: women in European history*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987, 375-96; N Chaudhuri and M Strobel, eds. *Western women and imperialism. Complicity and resistance*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992.

⁸The estate papers of Nellie Abdurahman indicate 'age of deceased' as 76 (Master's Office, Supreme Court Cape Town (hereafter MOSC): 3349/53, Death notice).

⁹*Ibid.*; *Spotlight*, 12 March 1948.

¹⁰R E van der Ross, *Say it out loud. The APO presidential addresses and other major political speeches 1906 - 1940 of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman*. Bellville: The Western Cape Institute for Historical Research, University of the Western Cape, 1990, 4. See also T C Smout, *A century of the Scottish people 1830 - 1950*. London: Collins, 1986, 210 ff.

¹¹*Spotlight*, 12 March 1948.

¹²T R Gourvish, The rise of the professions. In T R Gourvish and O'Day, eds. *Later Victorian Britain, 1867-1900*, London: Macmillan Education, 1988, 13.

¹³van der Ross, *Say it out loud*, 4.

Capetonian - middle class feminists, but in her case racial politics played a particular role, inscribed in her identity as wife and mother in a Coloured family.¹⁴

Nellie later recalled her first meeting with Abdullah, who had first registered at Glasgow University around 1888.¹⁵

[W]hile doing electioneering work for the Chancellor of the University of Glasgow, Helen James was introduced to young Abdurahman, a medical student, by one of his fellow students at the University, whose home was also in South Africa. They became friends, and in the home of the James family, Abdurahman was spared the loneliness of a stranger in a strange land.¹⁶

Nellie was already active politically, then, at a local level, before she met Abdullah. And if the Chancellor was friendly with the James family, as seems likely, Nellie's home would have been an opportune space for Abdullah to have acquired his taste for conversation with the cream of academic society.

Nellie Potter James agreed to change her religious affiliation in order to marry Abdullah Abdurahman, but she did not embrace Islam fully. She brought to Cape Town the trappings of her middle class western upbringing. Her own family traditions would be practised in Cape Town, including a traditional British Christmas dinner, which in turn became part of the family traditions of her younger daughter when she became Mrs Z Gool.¹⁷ Albert Lodge, the Abdurahman home, was an anomalous Edwardian middle class enclave situated on the edge of the poverty of District Six. Abdullah had gone to Britain for a British education; he returned with more than he could have hoped for: a medical degree and a British middle class bride, who was willing to marry according to Muslim rites only. Abdullah graduated

¹⁴See, for instance, M A Lind, *The compassionate memsahibs: Welfare activities of British women in India, 1900-1947*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988; B N Ramusack, Cultural missionaries, maternal imperialists, feminist allies. In N Chaudhuri and M Strobel, eds. *Western women and imperialism. Complicity and resistance*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992; R L Blumberg, White mothers as Civil Rights activists: The interweave of family and Movement roles. In G West and R L Blumberg, eds. *Women and social protest*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990, 166 - 179; G Bock and P Thane, eds. *Maternity and gender policies. Women and the rise of the European welfare states, 1880s-1950s*. London and New York: Routledge, 1991.

¹⁵W J de Kock, *Dictionary of South African Biography* (hereafter *DSAB*), I. Pretoria: Nasionale Boekhandel BPK, 1968, 1; van der Ross, *Say it out loud*, 3. W J van Beek, in a letter to the *Sun*, 8 March 1940, recalled having seen Abdurahman in 1889, shortly before his departure for Scotland. Dates are imprecise.

¹⁶*Spotlight*, 12 March 1948.

¹⁷Selim Gool (Cissie Gool's nephew), interviewed by Gairoonisa Paleker, nd (c2001), videotape, for Paleker's MA project, documentary of Cissie Gool, Centre for Popular Memory, University of Cape Town.

from Glasgow in 1893, and during his internship in London, married Nellie.¹⁸ They probably married in 1894, because Abdullah was back in Cape Town in January 1895, at which time he registered as a medical doctor.¹⁹ As their first child was born in 1896, according to the official birth register, there can be little doubt that Nellie Abdurahman accompanied her husband to Cape Town. As her grandson later related:

When Abdullah Abdurahman returned from Scotland ... he purchased No 7 Mount Street, the most prestigious mansion in the whole of District Six.²⁰

Nellie Abdurahman would reside here for the rest of her life.

The legal standing of marriage by Muslim rites in the Cape Colony at the turn of the twentieth century is not entirely clear. Since 1860, it had been possible for Cape magistrates to perform civil marriages, so those who were not of the Christian religion could have their marriages recognised in law. At the same time, it was possible for Imams to be recognised as marriage officers, but it is not clear whether this route was taken by the Cape Town Imams (the status was not automatic).²¹ Although Nellie and Abdullah's marriage in England by Muslim rites was not officiated 'by a recognised marriage officer',²² they apparently had the option of legitimising it on their return to Cape Town. A special magistrate's register had been established, but Nellie and Abdullah are absent from it, and

¹⁸ According to Nellie and Abdullah's grandson Rustum Gool, Abdullah arrived in the city in 1895, to be followed by Nellie in 1899, whereafter they married (Rustum Gool, E-Mail, read at the opening of the Cissie Gool Plaza, at the University of Cape Town, 3 July 2001). Other contemporaries of Cissie also reported that they were married in Cape Town, rather than in England (For example, Mr A Desai thought they married here (in conversation with the author, 11 July 2001)). Whether Nellie's parents would have been willing for her to leave Britain unmarried, is a moot question, and it is known that family relations between the James and Abdurahman family were, and continued to be, close, so it is unlikely that Nellie would have defied her parents. It would have been possible for the couple to have two weddings, one religious and the other secular, but there is no evidence that Nellie and Abdullah were ever married in the Cape. I have chosen to take as authoritative a note on the main file in Nellie's estate papers. This states that she and Abdullah were married in England, by Muslim rites, but it does not mention the date and precise location of the wedding. (Cape Archives (hereafter CA): MOOC 67759, Estate papers of Abdullah Abdurahman; MOSC: 3349/53, Estate papers of Helen (Nellie) Potter Abdurahman.) Van der Ross, *Say it out loud*, 4, has them marrying in Scotland.

¹⁹ Abdullah registered as a medical practitioner in Cape Town on 26 January, 1895 (*The Medical and Pharmacy Register for the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope*, vol III (July 1894-June 1895), 51).

²⁰ Rustum Gool, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2002.

²¹ After Union, a Supreme Court decision in 1913 invalidated 'all but Christian or civil marriages - any marriage contracted under Hindu or Moslem law would thus no longer be recognised as legally binding by the wider society' (C Walker, *The woman's suffrage movement in South Africa*. Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1971, 32). It is not clear, however, whether such marriages, performed by religious leaders who were not officially marriage officers, were considered legally binding before 1913.

²² MOSC: 3349/53, Estate papers of Helen (Nellie) Potter Abdurahman.

there is no evidence that they ever took this route. Very few Muslims appear on the 'Special Licence' register in the 1890s; in 1895 only one couple and in 1896, only two.²³

On Abdullah and Nellie's arrival in Cape Town, their marriage, being unregistered, would have been considered of no legal standing. However, this was never an issue, either for them or their children, who were always considered legitimate.²⁴ It was only when Nellie's estate papers were drawn up after her death, that the legitimacy of the marriage was queried.²⁵ In fact, being legally unmarried had its advantages, because it enabled property to be registered in Nellie's name, which could not be touched by Abdullah's creditors. It also empowered Nellie, because this property could not be claimed by Abdullah either.²⁶ Had they been married legally, Nellie would have had the status of a minor, in which case:

[T]he administration of the entire estate [would be] in the hands of the husband ... [who] ... has complete control of the joint estate, and transacts all business in connection therewith... A [married] woman ... has no power to deal with any part of the ... estate.²⁷

In addition to the liberal values that Abdullah shared with Nellie and which provided a framework which shaped her childhood, Cissie also inherited a tradition of visionary leadership and the wilful determination to transcend the confines of birth and limits set by the society in which she lived. She also inherited a position as a member of a highly respected District Six family, within Cape Town's black elite. Abdullah's paternal grandparents were slaves, and he celebrated their having broken free of slavery to establish themselves relatively quickly as wealthy, respectable, 'civilised' members of the Capetonian Muslim elite.

²³CA: MRG 1 (Special licences).

²⁴The official birth register does not declare Waradea's or Rosie's birth to be illegitimate, unlike others in the register, and their legitimacy was never called into question. In fact, none of the Muslim births registered in this period carry any hint of suspicion (CA: HAWA 1/3/9/3/3-4).

²⁵MOSC: 3349/53.

²⁶In the period covered by this chapter, Nellie acquired the following properties in central Cape Town. On 29 May 1908, she became the registered owner of no 5 and 6 McIntyre Lane; on 6 March 1915, she acquired 8 and 10 Wicht Street (the continuation of Mount Street, near Castle Bridge), and 6 Wicht Street was registered in her name on 15 January 1917. Other properties, including her home, would come into her possession in the early 1930s (MOSC: 3349/53. See also CA: MOOC 67759, Estate Papers, Abdullah Abdurahman).

²⁷I Geffen, *The laws of South Africa affecting women and children*. Johannesburg: Esson, 1928, 59, 64 - 65.

Nellie would certainly have heard of Abdullah's grandparents as Abdullah was very proud of his ancestry. His grandparents, like many others in District Six and the broader central Cape Town black community, had been slaves. According to Yusuf Rassool, Abdullah's grandfather was from Bengal.²⁸ He and Abdullah's grandmother had refused to accept their slave status. According to a visiting British traveller whom they met in the 1860s,²⁹ 'Abdul' had managed to save money in order to purchase his own freedom and then that of his wife, 'Betsy'. It has proved impossible to trace these slaves in official records, partly because they adopted Muslim names, which were not recorded in the slave registers and their slaveholders' names are not mentioned in the visitor's account.³⁰ Nevertheless, by the second decade of the nineteenth century, the practice of slave men saving money in order to purchase their freedom was well established in Cape Town, as was the conversion of slaves to Islam, which offered them an alternative identity in which they were regarded as respectable people, not slaves.³¹

Along with many other ex-bonded Capetonians, Abdul and Betsy made their own history. Having invested in purchasing their freedom, they started their lives as freed people without much, if any, capital and with the added responsibility of caring for Betsy's aged mother. Although no children are mentioned as having been born to the couple in slavery,³² Betsy gave birth to Abdul Rahman in the late 1830s (he was 'about twenty six' in 1862).³³ Assuming that he was not their only child, Abdul and Betsy would also have had to provide for children in the years after emancipation. As the owners of a fruit shop in Roeland Street, Cape Town, the former slave couple made a small fortune of around £5,000 through entrepreneurial talent and frugal living. Like numerous other ex-slaves, Abdul invested in

²⁸Y S Rassool, *District Six - Lest we forget. Recapturing subjugated cultural histories of Cape Town (1897-1956)*. Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 2000, 22.

²⁹Dorothea Fairbridge relates this in her edition of L Duff Gordon, *Letters from the Cape*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1921, 155 ff.

³⁰For the detailed search for Cissie's ancestors; see P van der Spuy, 'Searching for "Abdul Jemaalee and his wife Betsy": challenges facing South African slave genealogical research', work in progress, to be presented at the University of the Western Cape History Department and Women's and Gender Studies joint seminar, University of the Western Cape, second quarter, 2002.

³¹A Bank, *The decline of urban slavery at the Cape 1806-1843*. Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1991, 171 and *passim*. See also R Shell, Rites and rebellion: Islamic conversion at the Cape, 1808 to 1915. In C Saunders, H Phillips, E van Heyningen and V Bickford-Smith, eds. *Studies in the history of Cape Town*, vol 5. Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1984.

³²For a discussion of the ability of slaves to buy their own freedom, see Bank, *Decline*, 183, and P van der Spuy, Slave women and the family in nineteenth-century Cape Town, *South African Historical Journal* 27 (1992), 70 - 72.

³³Duff Gordon, *Letters*, 174.

property, and as a Muslim, although not legally recognised, wife, Betsy was in a position to trade in her own right. Although I have found no evidence that she did so, certain other Muslim women did own property in Cape Town. In 1862, for example, although few Muslims owned property valued at £1000 or more, more than 150 people with Muslim names owned sufficient property to qualify for the vote. Approximately twelve per cent of these were women, most, but not all of whom were widows.³⁴

Nellie would have met Abdullah's parents, who had accompanied him to Britain. Her mother-in-law, Gadija (also rendered as Khadija and Kadija) Dollie, was renowned as 'the prettiest Malay girl in Cape Town'.³⁵ She appears in the literature solely in a passive role as wife of Abdul Rahman and mother of Abdullah Abdurahman. However, the fact that she influenced her son and husband should not be ignored, even if, given the lack of available resources, the precise nature of her influence cannot be determined. In addition to her beauty, she was literate, a rarity among black women in the Cape. Her family, it seems, valued western education.³⁶

Nellie's father-in-law, Abdul Rahman, had benefited from the entrepreneurial skills of his former slave parents. They had become sufficiently wealthy to have him educated in Cairo, the centre of Islamic education at the time, and he was one of the first Capetonian Muslims to travel to Mecca. This kind of investment in their sons' religious educations and observances may have prevented the Muslim elite from investing all their money in property or trade, but it helped to create a strong sense of community among some of the scattered ex-bonded slaves who migrated to Cape Town after emancipation.

Apparently, Abdullah Abdurahman was 'the eldest son of the nine surviving children'.³⁷ Various sources place Abdullah's year of birth at either 1870 or 1872.³⁸ According to van

³⁴CA: 3/CT 7/1/2/1/20, Municipality of Cape Town, Assessment Rolls, 1862.

³⁵This description seems to have originated in Duff Gordon, *Letters*, 155.

³⁶This is shown by the fact that Abdul Rahman corresponded with her from Cairo (ibid).

³⁷DSAB I, 1.

³⁸It is impossible to verify either claim. Births were not officially registered, and there is no extant record of Muslim births as there is of Christian baptisms. UCT M&A: BCZA 83/30, Abdurahman Family Papers (microfilm, reel 1), gives 1870. Van der Ross, *Say it out loud*, 3, gives it as 18th December, 1870. H J Simons and R Simons, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*. London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1983, 117, give 1872. DSAB I, 1, has the birth date as '18.12.1872', but follows this with a question mark. The *Cape Standard*, 27 February 1940, gives Dr Abdurahman's age as 69 at the time of his death.

der Ross, Abdullah was born in Wellington - probably, he suggests, 'in that part of the town known as Verlatekloof'.³⁹ According to the *Cape Standard*, he 'attended a Mission school. His parents moved early to Cape Town'.⁴⁰ Later, Abdullah was transferred to St John's in Cape Town, a school run by the Marist Brothers. He completed his secondary education at the South African College School. He was one of very few - surprisingly, not the only - and one of the last dark-skinned scholars in an increasingly racist educational milieu.⁴¹ The intersection of Abdullah's family's Islamic background and his own western education would profoundly influence the course of the young man's life and his political development, and that of his wife and daughters.

Nellie would have been appalled at the racism that was eating away at the heart of the little schooling available to black children in Cape Town.⁴² According to Vivian Bickford-Smith:

Despite government intentions, and dominant class demands, not all Cape Town schools were segregated in the 1890s. Government policy did not yet have the sanction of law... [but] all first-class public schools were for Whites only from 1893, including the South African College School (SACS) which had previously admitted at least one 'off-coloured' pupil in the person of Abdullah Abdurahman...⁴³

Abdullah had then left the Cape in order to study medicine, which was not offered in southern Africa at the time. As Elizabeth van Heyningen has noted, the South African College 'was poorly equipped to provide an adequate background for a medical training'.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Abdullah persevered with his education in Glasgow and became a highly respected medical doctor.

³⁹Van der Ross, *Say it out loud*, 3. See also APO, 1 January 1910; UCT M&A: BCZA 83/32, Abdurahman family collection (microfilm, reel 2).

⁴⁰*Cape Standard*, 27 February 1940.

⁴¹An undated photograph of SACS indicates that a number of dark-skinned scholars were enrolled at one time. The donor of the photograph claimed that one of these boys was Abdullah (UCT M&A, SACS folders, photographs).

⁴²*Spotlight*, 12 March 1948.

⁴³Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic pride*, 142 - 143. The paragraph continues: 'The teacher-training Normal College turned away 'coloured' children, as did the private Marist Brothers School which had previously admitted them. But there were still four 'coloured' students at the second-class West End public non-denominational school in the municipality in 1893, and two at Woodstock. By 1905, both these schools were Whites-only institutions, as were the non-denominational public schools established in District Six, Tamboerskloof, Observatory, Maitland, Plumstead, Durbanville, Muizenberg, Bellville (near Parow) and Brooklyn (near Maitland), within greater Cape Town. Yet two public schools, at Mowbray and Parow, had one and five 'coloured' students enrolled respectively' (Ibid., 143).

Zainonesa Abdurahman's paternal forebears witnessed the beginnings of formal black political engagement at a local level in Cape Town. Her own political activism derived partly from these beginnings. The quest for civil, political and economic liberation which dominated the life of the woman who became 'Cissie Gool' had roots in her slave ancestry, and the way in which her paternal ancestors transformed themselves from slaves into prosperous members of the tiny Capetonian black elite. Her direct ancestors did not play overtly political roles, as far as can be ascertained, but they were related to the Effendi family, which produced early Muslim leaders who engaged directly with electoral politics.⁴⁵ Moreover, their very lives were profoundly political, representing a challenge to notions of racial and religious inferiority.⁴⁶

Zainonesa Abdurahman was born into a society in which her father, with his horse-drawn buggy and medical bag, had already established himself as a member of Cape Town's tiny, 'black', 'Malay', elite, which 'like other Black elites, consisted of the relatively small number of Western-educated, largely petty-bourgeois individuals who could qualify for the vote.'⁴⁷ Women were not enfranchised at any level and are therefore excluded from this androcentric definition, despite their contribution not only as wives and mothers but also as property owners and traders on their own account. Significantly, Abdul and Betsy's shop was named 'Betsy's Fruiterers'.⁴⁸ At the very least, men did not become 'respectable', a key marker of elite status, without the assistance of women, and certainly by the early twentieth century, male political leaders were underlining the 'civilising' duty of wives and mothers within homes.⁴⁹

⁴⁴E van Heyningen, *Public health and society in Cape Town 1880 - 1910*. PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1989, 74 - 5.

⁴⁵Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic pride*, 205.

⁴⁶For detail on black men's political activism in this period, see, for instance, *ibid.*; R E van der Ross, *The rise and decline of apartheid. A study of political movements among the Coloured people of South Africa, 1880-1985*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1986; G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall: a history of South African 'Coloured' politics*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987.

⁴⁷Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic pride*, 193. Bickford-Smith notes: 'The uniting concern of Cape Town's White dominant class remained the maintenance of their own elite position ... In general, Cape Town's dominant class derived its income from "rent, banking and commerce" rather than from primary production. ... By the 1890s dominant class ideology favoured state intervention on their behalf as well as the separation of all Blacks from all Whites' (30 - 31; 89 - 90). 'Petty bourgeois' is defined by Bickford-Smith to cover non-manual occupations from tradesmen through small shopkeepers, and includes 'the likes of hotel keepers, minor professionals and commercial travellers' (20 - 21). 'Elite' 'petty bourgeois' status is conferred on those who qualified for the franchise.

⁴⁸Duff Gordon, *Letters*, 155.

Zainonesa's father was one of three black doctors in Cape Town at the end of the nineteenth century, and one of only 66 professional 'Malays' listed in the 1904 Cape census.⁵⁰ In that year, he was the first black man to be elected onto the Cape Town City Council. The limits of his ambition were set by a racist 'glass ceiling' which became progressively opaque and ultimately impenetrable by the time of his death in 1940. After Union in 1910, he had no chance of fulfilling any political ambition to become a Member of Parliament; neither would he be elected Mayor of the City of Cape Town, despite decades of service.

Dr Abdurahman strove for, and achieved, the status of middle class solidity.⁵¹ His wife never worked for a living. He presided over a home in which Edwardian middle class culture was evident in the furnishings, the pianoforte, the well-stocked study, and also reflected in the etiquette and family rituals that maintained the middle class ethic. When the doctor left home in the morning to attend to his patients, and later to his political commitments, he carried with him the confirmation of his elite status provided by his position in the family. As part of this milieu, Dr Abdurahman was head of the household, and in all aspects of his private and professional life, he played the part of benign patriarch, administering discipline, wisdom and assuming the right to 'the last word'.⁵² It was in this role, rather than in terms of any specific ideological content, that the relationship between father and daughter would be most significant.

The Cape Town to which Abdullah introduced his new bride was moving rapidly towards the segregationist attitudes and practices of those further north, associated with the mineral revolution.⁵³ Abdullah and his family had left Cape Town around the time of the so-called Cemetery riots, when both Muslims and Calvinist Christians had protested the destruction of cemeteries in Cape Town and their removal beyond the city limits. The local press had focused on Muslim resistance and characterised Capetonian society as polarised along

⁴⁹See Chapter Two.

⁵⁰Cape of Good Hope *Census*, 1904; Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic pride*, 86.

⁵¹In her series of interviews on Cissie Gool, Gairoonisa Paleker refers to the family on one occasion as 'upper class' and 'bourgeois', but in a number of interviews settles on 'petite bourgeois', with which her interviewees tend to agree. See her interviews with Ray Simons, R O Dudley and Selim Gool. In her interview with Alie Fataar, however, they agree on the designation 'bourgeois'. See series of videotapes, interviews of the aforementioned people with Gairoonisa Paleker, nd, Centre for Popular Memory, University of Cape Town.

⁵²Rustum Gool noted that Abdurahman's initials reflected his sense of self-importance: 'A A: the first letter of the alphabet followed by the first letter of the alphabet' (Rustum Gool, in telephonic conversation with the author, 23 February 2002).

⁵³Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic pride*, 8.

religious as well as racial lines, although the crisis was not exclusively Muslim.⁵⁴ 1882 had seen a smallpox epidemic,⁵⁵ followed by 'Malays boycott Legislative Council elections'⁵⁶ and in 1886 the cemetery resistance.⁵⁷ Although there is no hard evidence that Abdullah's father, Abdul Rahman, was personally involved in the cemetery campaign, such a scenario is possible. In any case, the hardening of dominant class attitudes to Muslims would have been clear to him and to Gadija.

According to Bickford-Smith:

From 1882 there [had been] signs that Malays, faced with the increasing hostility of Englishness, were reluctant to give their support to White candidates at local and central political levels. Malays boycotted the 1882 town council and 1883 Legislative council elections ... The frustrations they faced over the cemetery issue, coming on top of increasing English hostility and the experience of social exclusion, finally led to the decision by key members of the Malay elite to put forward their own candidate in the late 1880s ... Black political mobilisation in the early 1890s [led by such as Effendi and 'Mahomet' Dollie] ... broke with the previous 'small tradition' practice of Black support for White parliamentary candidates. In 1889 the *Lantern* reported that 'the Mahomedans [sic] of Cape Town are labouring under a violent political awakening.' ... Mahomet Dollie [reportedly spoke of] ... his down-trodden Malay brethren's firm determination to return one of themselves at the next general election.⁵⁸

Abdullah Abdurahman's family was related to both the Effendis and the Dollies, and this undoubtedly influenced Abdullah's later decision to enter politics. As far as Muslim women were concerned, their political activism was more hidden. One reason for this is the androcentric nature of the historiography of black politics, which fails to see a political role for women, perhaps partly because they were not enfranchised and 'politics' is generally very narrowly conceived. However, there is evidence of women's political engagement. In 1885, for example, a male-only deputation to the Colonial Secretary about the proposed

⁵⁴Van Heyningen, *Public Health*, chapter 4, especially 167 ff.

⁵⁵Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic pride*, 194.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 195.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

closing of cemeteries in the town 'was accompanied by three to four thousand women and children who were stationed outside Parliament.'⁵⁹ Their presence was not interpreted as political by the historian who reported this incident. He speculates that the women were there 'possibly to demonstrate the strong community sentiments'.⁶⁰ On the other hand, Yusuf da Costa and Achmat Davids argue that many Muslim women in Cape Town 'embraced the veil' as a deliberate political statement at this time, refusing to assimilate to the western culture of Christian, White imperialists. They suggest that Muslim women embraced a 'Muslim consciousness' at this time.⁶¹ If Davids and da Costa are correct, Muslim women's politicisation comprised a retreat from, rather than an active participation in, formal politics, which in any case excluded them from any role but to support enfranchised men. Nellie would choose a different route for the expression of her political will, as would her daughters.

In 1904, in the aftermath of the Treaty of Vereeniging, Dr Abdurahman was the main speaker on a political platform calling for the extension of the non-racial male franchise to the former Boer republics, now the northern territories.⁶² Richard van der Ross suggests that this meeting was crucial for the political ascendancy of Dr Abdurahman. It is also significant as a signpost for the existence of political consciousness among women in general and Nellie in particular.⁶³ In general terms, the South African war did not generate political activism among women. This, at least, is the inevitable conclusion one must reach, reading the secondary literature on 'Coloured' politics.⁶⁴ However, androcentricity in the literature does not mean that women were not politically informed and active. As this 1904 meeting demonstrates, some women, notably those who were married to political leaders, were indeed willing to take a public political stand.

⁵⁹A Davids, *The mosques of Bo-Kaap. A social history of Islam at the Cape*. Athlone, Cape Town: South African Institute of Arabic and Islamic Research, 1980, 75.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Y da Costa and A Davids, *Pages from Cape Muslim history*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1994, 61 - 66.

⁶²Van der Ross, *Rise and decline*, 27. See also *South African News*, 23 March 1904 (UCT M&A: BCZA 83/30).

⁶³Van der Ross suggests it was here that Abdurahman so impressed Matt Fredericks, that he set about organising the coup within the APO leadership that led to Abdurahman's accession to the presidency (*Rise and Decline*, 27).

⁶⁴Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, gives no sense of women's political work in the early period.

Nellie Abdurahman and the APO's then-president's wife, 'Mrs Tobin' joined the men on this public platform in March 1904.⁶⁵ Typically, only Dr Abdurahman's speech has been preserved, so it is unknown whether either woman spoke.⁶⁶ Van der Ross lists the people on the platform, including the women, but does not comment on their presence.⁶⁷ The contemporary press, also, did not comment on the presence of women on the platform; it did not take issue with a black woman actively supporting political demands. If Mrs Tobin's presence was not considered news-worthy, the press's silence may suggest that she was not the first, or only, black woman active in politics, but lost to the historical record. As will be discussed below, the formation of the APO Women's Guild a few years later, and its rapid expansion, demonstrated the political consciousness of black women, and this did not emerge from a vacuum. In any event, it is significant that both Mrs Tobin and Mrs Abdurahman agreed to participate, publicly, in mainstream black politics.

In addition to joining her husband on political platforms demanding men's suffrage, Nellie Abdurahman was involved with early women's philanthropic organisations in Cape Town, which saw the beginnings of the women's suffrage movement here. It has been suggested that the first meeting of the Young Women's Christian Association was held at her home. It is possible that the meeting referred to was that of the Coloured branch, which was established in 1917.⁶⁸ Nellie is unlikely to have become deeply involved in this organisation, however, because its 'indelible commitment to Protestant evangelicalism' would not have melded with Nellie's recent conversion to Islam.⁶⁹ As Greg Cuthbertson notes, 'there was no sense in which membership was extended to non-Christians. Rather, it remained exclusive from 1897'.⁷⁰

⁶⁵Although van der Ross does not comment on Nellie, he suggests that '[T]his was probably the first meeting of any size and importance to be addressed by Dr Abdurahman.' (*Rise and decline*, 28.)

⁶⁶*South African News*, 23 March 1904.

⁶⁷Van der Ross, *Rise and decline*, 28.

⁶⁸R Bunche, *An African American in South Africa: the travel notes of Ralph J Bunche, 28 September 1937 - 1 January 1938*, ed. R R Edgar. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1992, 57. The YWCA itself had been established in the Cape in 1886, and by 1891, was 'putting down roots in Cape Town' (G Cuthbertson, *God, youth and women. The YWCAs of Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: The YWCAs of Southern Africa, 1986, 8).

⁶⁹Cuthbertson, *God*, 8. Despite a report in *Drum Magazine* which claimed otherwise, there is no evidence that Nellie held onto her Christian religion, although none that she fully acceded to Islam either. She never adopted any sign of religious affiliation in her dress. See *Drum*, January 1956, and M Ajam, *The raison d'être of the Muslim Mission Primary School in Cape Town and environs from 1860 to 1980 with special reference to the role of Dr A Abdurahman in the modernisation of Islam-oriented schools*. PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1986, 191.

⁷⁰Cuthbertson, *God*, 11.

However, there is evidence that Nellie became more deeply involved in the activities of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which espoused values close to her own, and from which the first women's suffrage organisation in the Cape emerged.⁷¹ WCTU was established in the Cape Colony in 1889, so again it could not have been formed in Nellie's home, but meetings could well have been held there in the early years. The organisation made use of 'drawing room meetings', and the Abdurahman home was a venue for many such gatherings through the years.⁷² WCTU, while built on a Christian ethic, did not insist on religious affiliation. As Amanda Tiltman records:

WCTU was ... founded to stop the 'evils of intemperance' and every member took a pledge to 'abstain from all alcoholic liquors as a beverage, whether distilled, fermented or malted; and to employ all proper means to discourage the use of traffic in the same.'⁷³

WCTU came to have three main concerns, or 'branches': Temperance, Purity and the Franchise. Although we have no evidence that Nellie was involved in Purity campaigns,⁷⁴ she supported temperance, in agreement with her husband.⁷⁵ Nellie also became deeply involved in the struggle for women's suffrage, an issue that would impact profoundly on Cissie's life.⁷⁶

For WCTU, 'the franchise was seen as 'the instrument, the only direct instrument whereby the two others (temperance and purity) could be promoted.'⁷⁷ The Franchise Department was established in Kimberley in 1895, but the members may well have met in Nellie's

⁷¹I have located no membership lists, minutes or other manuscript records of the WCTU. If Nellie did not take on a leading role, she was perhaps too busy with other affairs closer to the heart of District Six to write for WCTU publication. Amanda Tiltman found information on other women in WCTU in the pages of the *White Ribbon*, and in other publications (A Tiltman, *The Woman's Christian Temperance Union of the Cape Colony: 1889 - 1910*. BA Hons diss., University of Cape Town, 1988).

⁷²First annual report of the Women's Enfranchisement League, 8 April 1908, np.

⁷³Tiltman, WCTU, 2 - 3.

⁷⁴For a discussion of 'purity' campaigns, see E van Heyningen, *The social evil in the Cape Colony 1868 - 1902: prostitution and the Contagious Diseases Acts*, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 10, 2 (April 1984), 170 - 197; N Worden, E van Heyningen and V Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town: The making of a city. An illustrated social history*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1998, 236.

⁷⁵The African Political Organisation under Dr Abdurahman fully and vociferously supported total prohibition of alcohol for 'Natives' and 'Coloured' people, and saw alcohol as a major obstacle in the 'civilising' process. (See, for instance, *APO*, 1 January 1910). Ettie Stakesby-Lewis, Olive Schreiner's elder sister, was deeply involved in the temperance movement, and associated with the Abdurahmans. Thanks to Dr Helen Bradford for alerting me to her.

⁷⁶Of the few items belonging to Nellie in the Abdurahman papers, many refer to this issue (UCT M&A: BCZA 83/30).

home.⁷⁸ Julia Solly was Superintendent of this Department for most of its existence, to 1930. There is plentiful evidence that Nellie knew Solly, with whom she corresponded from time to time, although there is no evidence of intimacy between them. Tiltman mentions two other leading members of WCTU, Mary Brown and Emily Solomon. Although there is no direct evidence, there is little doubt that Nellie would have known Mary Brown. Not only did she join WCTU in 1902, but they shared a profound concern for education, and they had mutual friends and acquaintances. Brown had attended 'the first classes for women held at UCT. She [had also] married a doctor and trained as a mid-wife to help him in his work... She was a close friend of Olive Schreiner (The Story of an African Farm is actually dedicated to Mary Brown).'⁷⁹ Olive Schreiner, along with her brother WP, one time Prime Minister of the Cape, and supporter of the liberal Cape franchise, would become a close friend of the Abdurahman family in the early twentieth century.

Nellie Abdurahman and Olive Schreiner were among the women who joined the Women's Enfranchisement League, founded by WCTU, in Cape Town in 1907, Schreiner and Mary Brown being elected vice-presidents.⁸⁰ Olive has been portrayed by Elizabeth Everett as 'a close friend of the family', although no documentary evidence has been located to demonstrate this friendship.⁸¹ Nevertheless, it is clear that they were often together and shared many interests.⁸² Nellie and Olive's common stand on women's enfranchisement suggests friendship between the two women. Olive resigned from the WEL when it no longer fought for the enfranchisement of *all* women, and although there is evidence that

⁷⁷Tiltman, WCTU, 5.

⁷⁸J Solly, Franchise and the WCTU, *White Ribbon*, May - June 1911, 2.

⁷⁹Tiltman, WCTU, 10 - 11. See also M Brown, *Olive Schreiner: memories of a friendship*. Cape Town: Pioneer Press, 1923. Mary Brown first met Olive in 1873, in a small Karroo village. Brown and her husband moved to Cape Town, to the suburb of Rondebosch, in 1904. Although Olive was not based in Cape Town, she did visit from time to time. She and Mary were involved in the formation of the Women's Enfranchisement League's Cape Town branch. See also K Schoeman, *Olive Schreiner: A woman in South Africa 1855-1881*, trans. H Snijders. Parklands: Jonathan Ball, 1991.

⁸⁰Brown, *Olive Schreiner*.

⁸¹E Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool 1897-1963: A biography. BA Hons diss., University of Cape Town, 1978, 2. Her source is Zelda Friedlander, whom I have not been able to trace, but who edited a collection of memoirs of Olive (*Until the heart changes. A garland for Olive Schreiner*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1967). Whereas Olive's relationships with other women like Mary Brown and Ruth Alexander are well documented, that with Nellie and her daughters is hidden. I have located no correspondence between Olive and Nellie, and no reference to Nellie in biographies of Olive. Similarly, Nellie did not keep any press clippings or other documentation about Olive, although she did collect material on women's suffrage. See UCT M&A: BCZA 83/30, 83/34. These include a clipping from the *Cape Times* on 'the Woman's vote' (9 July 1909), and pamphlets on the South African and British suffrage campaigns.

⁸²For example, Nellie and Olive were both at the docks to see off Abdullah and W P Schreiner when they left for England in 1909. See Chapter Two.

Nellie continued to associate with this organisation, she stood on political platforms demanding black as well as White women's enfranchisement.⁸³

In Cape Town at this time, there was a one in four chance that a 'non-European' baby would not survive the first five years of life.⁸⁴ Nellie Abdurahman gave birth to two - and only two - children in this period, both survived, and indeed, thrived. In many ways, Cissie Abdurahman's childhood was extraordinary, due to the chance of her birth into this particular family within the tiny black Capetonian elite. Not only did she and her elder sister survive the first five years of life, but they did so in the face of life-threatening diseases that dogged the town, including chronic tuberculosis and the plague epidemic of 1901.⁸⁵ Having a father who was a medical doctor no doubt helped to protect the health of the children. However, they were born into a community whose infrastructure was poorly maintained, lacked adequate sanitation, and was increasingly overcrowded, partly due to the influx of refugees from the South African War (1899-1902).

Life narratives often begin with birth dates. Such uncontroversial facts are assumed useful in order to delimit a life, to set boundaries within which the life was lived, to suggest certainty and order. We all are born. We all die. These facts must be pinned down. Zainonesa Abdurahman's birth date has been subject to controversy, a not inappropriate way to introduce her unconventional life.

Around the time that Nellie and Abdullah settled in Cape Town, the colonial government enacted the first legislation providing for the registration of births and deaths. The Births and Deaths registration Act no 7 of 1894 came into operation in 1895.⁸⁶ Nellie's first child, Waradea (who became known as Rosie) was born on 8 May, 1896, according to the official Birth Register.⁸⁷ When I started the research for this project, the relevant official birth registers were closed, so I searched the secondary literature.⁸⁸ Rosie's only sibling,

⁸³R First and A Scott, *Olive Schreiner: A biography*. London: Andre Deutsch, 1980.

⁸⁴*APO*, 20 November 1909. See also *APO*, 14 January 1911.

⁸⁵Van Heyningen, Public health, 259 ff. Figures are provided on 307: In the Cape Peninsula, 401 'Coloured' plus 'Asiatic' cases were reported, with 236 deaths. The last case was discovered in January 1902.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 249 ff.

⁸⁷CA: HAWC 1/3/9/3/3, folio 58.

⁸⁸Birth Registers, located in the state archives, Cape Town are closed for 100 years. In this case I was not given access to the 1897 register because it was part of the register for the year 1899. I could only access these records in 2000.

Zainonesa was born, according to various secondary sources, either in 1897, or in 1900. According to an obituary published in the *Cape Times*, and used as an authority in an honours dissertation, her birth date was 6 November, 1897.⁸⁹ *The Dictionary of South African Biography* confirms this date, as does the more recently published *Cape Town in the twentieth century*.⁹⁰ However, Alex La Guma's biography of James La Guma gives Cissie's birth year as 1900.⁹¹ This echoes statements made by writers on Coloured or black radical politics, notably the Karis and Carter profiles of activists.⁹² Most interesting, Cissie Gool herself disputed the 'fact' presented in the *DSAB*, when as an adult she filled in registration forms at the University of Cape Town. Over a period of years, she claimed to have been born, not even in November, and never in 1897, but on 10 September 1898, 1899 and 1900.⁹³ Perhaps Cissie did not want her actual birth date to be known, or perhaps she never knew it. At one stage, she declared that her birth date was unknowable, declaring that it had not been registered.⁹⁴ In the late nineteenth century, there was not the obsession with official documentation and bureaucratic control that exists today. Cissie could assert that her birth had been unregistered, with no fear of contradiction, because at that time many births would not have been. When, driven by my late twentieth-century obsession with accurate dating, I was able to access the official birth registers, I discovered that - according to her father, who registered her on 9 December 1897 - 'Zainonesa' Abdurahman was born on 6 November 1897, at 7 Mount Street, District Six, Cape Town.⁹⁵

No controversy surrounds Zainonesa's *place* of birth. Like most Capetonian children at the time, of whatever racial classification or class, she was born at home. In the late nineteenth

⁸⁹Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 1. Her source is *Cape Times*, 7 July 1963.

⁹⁰*DSAB* IV, 188; Bickford-Smith et al, *Cape Town*, 87.

⁹¹M Adhikari, ed. *Jimmy La Guma. A biography by Alex La Guma*. Cape Town: Friends of the South African Library, 1997, 84.

⁹²G. Gerhart and T Karis, ed. *Political profiles, 1882-1964. Vol 4: T Karis and G M Carter, series eds. From protest to challenge. A documentary history of African politics in South Africa 1882-1964*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1977, 35.

⁹³University of Cape Town (hereafter UCT) Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1918, 383 (gives 10 September 1898); 1922, 937 (gives 10 September 1899); 1931, 1032 (gives 10 September 1900); 1932, no number (gives September 1899, no day). Waradea also claimed birth dates that were at odds with the official register: she declared that she was born on 9, not 8, May, in 1896, and again, 1897. See UCT Archives, Student Registration Forms, 1918, 307 and 1919, 531.

⁹⁴UCT Archives, Student Registration Forms, 1962, 3346: Cissie wrote, 'not registered (doubt)'.

⁹⁵CA: HAWA 1/3/9/3/4, folio 76. On the register, her father's residence is indicated as 99 Loop Street. However, this suggests an absence of communication between clerk and Abdurahman, as this was the location of the latter's surgery.

century, there were no maternity hospitals, and few registered midwives.⁹⁶ It was only after the First World War that St. Monica's Home (which was for 'fallen' women and hence inappropriate), Booth Memorial and the Peninsula Maternity Hospital were opened in the town. Although midwifery would have been part of Abdullah's training, he did not oversee the birth of his children. This was the province of women, and if no registered midwife were available, a 'Gamp', as unregistered, but experienced, midwives from the community were known, filled this role, with the assistance of women relatives or friends.⁹⁷ As Muslims, the children would have been subject to the *doopmal*, 'the naming ceremony of the newborn baby with all its trimmings: with crow-foot-like insignia drawn on the forehead, the baby being carried on a tray decorated with flowers'.⁹⁸ This ceremony would have helped Nellie to integrate into the Cape Muslim community.

In the context of District Six in the late nineteenth century, even within the tiny black elite, one aspect of the Abdurahman family was strikingly unusual. Statistical and anecdotal evidence suggest that to have only two children was rare, even in bourgeois Cape families.⁹⁹ While this figure may be perfectly in keeping with contemporary middle class norms in Britain or the United States,¹⁰⁰ the trend towards smaller families was not yet established in Cape Town's middle class. Charles Simkins and Elizabeth van Heyningen's analysis of fertility in the Cape examined trends between 1891 and 1904 in terms of racial classification, rather than class. Nevertheless, their finding that 'whites had only just started to limit marital fertility' is significant. They reported that 'fertility ... appears natural' in all other cases.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶According to the *Medical and Pharmacy Register for the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope*, Vol III, 1 July 1894 - 30 June 1895, there were nine registered midwives living in Cape Town and its suburbs as at 30 June 1895. See also H Deacon, Racial segregation and medical discourse in 19th century Cape Town, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22 (2) 1996, 287 - 308.

⁹⁷Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001. She would later train as a midwife herself.

⁹⁸Achmat Davids points out the centrality of ceremonials to Cape Muslims. Key life stages were ritualised, including birth, marriage and death (Da Costa and Davids, *Pages from Cape Muslim history*, 47).

⁹⁹See C Simkins and E van Heyningen, Fertility, mortality, and migration in the Cape Colony, 1891 - 1904, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22 (1) 1989, 79 - 111.

¹⁰⁰For an early example of British research, see A McLaren, Abortion in England, 1890 - 1914, *Victorian Studies* 20, 1977. Later work includes A McLaren, *A history of contraception*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; L Gordon, *Woman's body, woman's right: birth control in America*. New York: Harmondsworth, 1977.

¹⁰¹Simkins and van Heyningen, Fertility, 98.

It is most likely that Nellie became infertile after Cissie's birth; there is no knowledge of any miscarriages, but this too is possible.¹⁰² Oral sources have confirmed that Abdullah desperately wanted a son. Contraception would have been most unlikely in that case.¹⁰³ Infertility was not a factor for Abdullah, who much later in life fathered three more children, including, at last, a son. Dr Abdurahman's medical records have disappeared, and therefore one cannot identify the size of families under his personal care in order to get a better sense of the community's attitudes towards childbearing.¹⁰⁴ However, in general, families were limited in size by infant mortality more than by infertility. The first statistical report on infant mortality 'emphasized the very high number of deaths among children. In 1909 Dr Abdurahman reported:

During the last ten years, 17 000 coloured children were born in Cape Town, but out of that number no fewer than 4 342 of them died before they reached twelve months... out of every four children born in Cape Town, one died during the first year... Last year, there died in Cape Town 324 children under twelve months of age¹⁰⁵

Nevertheless, despite less than perfectly safe methods of birthing, and post-partum care of both babies and mothers, most families were relatively large.

Unlike families comprising many children, the Abdurahman nuclear family was 'modern' in the sense that the mother could focus attention on only two children. They would look to her for guidance, rather than to other siblings. They also lived as a small family in a large house, and did not experience the more typical conditions of overcrowding that most people in District Six were subjected to. Of the parents, Nellie was the chief carer of the children,

¹⁰²Olive Schreiner, for instance, had three miscarriages, two of these in 1896. These are known from letters, but such evidence does not remain for Nellie, assuming that she would have shared this information in writing (R Rive, Olive Schreiner (1855-1920): A biographical and critical study. PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1974, 180).

¹⁰³Rustum Gool, in telephonic conversation with the author, 23 February 2002.

¹⁰⁴To put some names to the statistics: Mrs Gow, founder member of the AME church in South Africa had 'a number of children, eleven of whom survived' (APO, 6 November 1909.) Noor Ebrahim's grandmother, Mariam, a Scottish immigrant who, like Nellie, had converted to Islam in order to marry a Muslim, gave birth to ten sons and two daughters (N Ebrahim, *Noor's story. My life in District Six*. Cape Town: The District Six Museum Foundation, 1999, 4). There is also a photograph of Noor's grandmother, on permanent display at the District Six Museum, Cape Town). Another highly respected Muslim family with whom the Abdurahmans were closely associated, the Gools, had many children. Yusuf Gool, immigrant from India, married a number of wives; Waghieda Ta'al, Cissie's future mother-in-law, had seven children (There were five daughters and two sons: Timmie, Gadija, Zobeida, Janub, Amina, Abdul Hamid (the eldest) and Goolam). Apparently Yusuf Gool had 16 children altogether (UCT M&A: BC 1004, Western Cape Oral History Project interview, Minnie Gool, interviewer P Maurice, nd).

although domestic workers were employed.¹⁰⁶ Abdullah's medical career and political concerns kept him away from the house for much of the time, and he travelled frequently for political reasons, so for some of the time he was an absent father.¹⁰⁷ In any case, he was not expected to participate in the personal care of young children; this, he firmly believed, was the role of the mother. For Nellie, mothering children was only part of her life's work.

The Abdurahman daughters were born at a time when a non-racial but qualified, male-only franchise operated in the Cape Colony. They grew up through a period of disillusionment in the aftermath of the South African War, followed by black political organisation and agitation for the preservation of men's political rights in the Cape, and the extension of such rights to the northern ex-Boer republics. The South Africa Act proved to be the 'Great Betrayal' of liberalism and of the Coloured people, with whom Cissie's father chose to identify himself as leader, although his identity was not fixed in racial terms, as is indicated by his identification of himself as Indian when he asked Nellie to marry him.¹⁰⁸ Despite the process of disillusionment and disappointment, throughout her childhood, the young Cissie experienced in those around her a fervent belief in the power of education to overcome all odds, a belief in the inevitable progress of human culture. The 1892 Ballot Act ensured that, from then on, education was a political necessity, required in order to qualify for the limited franchise.

Cissie's childhood was framed by major world political events: she was born shortly before the outbreak of the South African War, and grew to adulthood through the First World War. But her family did not lose a father to either war; he remained in Cape Town, and focused on medical and political work. Dr Abdurahman did not participate in active service in the South African War (1899-1902). Instead, he remained in Cape Town to deal with some of its effects, particularly in the medical sphere. During the War, more than 25,000

¹⁰⁵ *APO*, 20 November 1909. See also *APO*, 14 January 1911.

¹⁰⁶ See Cissie's letter to her father, 31 December 1911, discussed in Chapter Three (UCT M&A: BC1081, Simons Collection, Organisations, folder N).

¹⁰⁷ For example, in addition to travel to England as part of deputations in 1906 and 1909, he toured the country visiting APO branches. For example, in December 1907 he visited the Port Elizabeth branch (UCT M&A: BC 506, B5.2, news clips, *South African News*, 9 December 1907). In August 1910, he went, *inter alia*, to the Kimberley branch, which requested that in future 'Mrs and the Misses Abdurahman will accompany him...' (*APO*, 10 September 1910).

¹⁰⁸ See, for instance, *APO*, 7 May 1910, 4 June 1910. The question of racial identities which the Abdurahman family highlights, is discussed in the introduction, and in chapter 4 in the context of protests around the 'Indian Problem' in the mid-1920s.

impoverished refugees flooded into Cape Town, many seeking accommodation in an already overcrowded District Six.¹⁰⁹ Given Nellie's later, documented, involvement in many different kinds of charitable concerns, she would certainly have helped with relief work during this period. She may have volunteered for the Ladies' Relief Committee, but would soon have seen that, despite the fact that 'aid to suffering was said to know no distinction of race, colour or creed', this was not the case in practice. 'Coloured men ... received no help at all.'¹¹⁰

The South African War impacted on the Abdurahman family via the bubonic plague epidemic.¹¹¹ As a result of the epidemic, forced removals were introduced to Cape Town: 'the first Africans from District Six (Horstley Street) were transferred to Uitvlugt' on the Cape Flats.¹¹² Africans were 'moved out'; others not classified 'European' remained. For Africans, and many others, desperately impoverished, the social impact of the plague was far greater than the number of deaths suffered.¹¹³

The plague presented Abdullah with the challenge of reconciling his religious roots with his medical training, and also the opportunity to hone his mediation skills. Van Heyningen records that 'the colonial authorities anticipated some resistance from the Muslims. They ... did take steps to calm Muslim fears but they remained insensitive to religious demands.'¹¹⁴ The Muslim community was 'deeply divided' on whether or not to support the authorities. There is no mention of Abdullah negotiating between Imams and authorities, but according to van Heyningen:

¹⁰⁹Bickford-Smith, et al, *Cape Town*, 13; van Heyningen, *Public health*, 286. See also *ibid.*, 226: the population of the town increased from 51,251 in 1898 to 77,668 in 1904, after many of the refugees would have left.

¹¹⁰Bickford-Smith, et al, *Cape Town*, 13. Nellie's later charitable concerns, established after the First World War and the Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1918, included the Cape Town and Wynberg Board of Aid. See UCT M&A: BCZA 83/30, Abdurahman family collection, (microfilm, reel 1).

¹¹¹E van Heyningen, *Cape Town and the Plague in 1901*. In C Saunders, ed. *Studies in the history of Cape Town*, vol 4. Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1981, 98 - 101.

¹¹²C Saunders, *The creation of Ndabeni: urban segregation, social control and African resistance*. Paper presented at the Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1978; C Saunders, *The creation of Ndabeni*. In C Saunders, ed. *Studies in the history of Cape Town*, vol 1. Cape Town: History Department, University of Cape Town, 1978.

¹¹³Van Heyningen, *Public health*, 325.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 343 - 4.

Dr Abdurahman, recently returned from his training in Europe, joined the plague doctors. He probably acted as an intermediary between the medical authorities and the Muslim community.¹¹⁵

As the wife of a medical doctor involved with combating the plague that consumed the town, Nellie would have been very busy outside her home. The spacious, relatively sanitary conditions of double-storey Albert Lodge and the medical knowledge of Abdurahman served to protect the children, but we do not know how it affected other children in the wider community; children and the elderly would have been most vulnerable.¹¹⁶ Van Heyningen's detailed account does not mention the extent to which children were affected by the plague, and, as she points out, 'the plague victims themselves have left few records.'¹¹⁷

Another vital influence of the South African War on Cissie's family was the impetus it gave to political organisation in Cape Town. As Bickford-Smith et al note, the South African War served to politicise Capetonians:

Perhaps the most significant result of the war was to politicise social groups in Cape Town that had previously been outside the mainstream of political life.... In Wynberg coloured people, fiercely patriotic, formed a branch of the imperialist South African League, which, they believed, supported "equal rights for every civilised man". In 1901 John Tobin started the Stone meetings at which, regularly on Sundays, coloured people met at the top of Clifton Street in District Six to debate political issues, current affairs and labour matters. A strong black consciousness strain ran through the rhetoric...¹¹⁸

From a photograph of a Stone meeting taken around this time, it is clear that the 'Coloured people' referred to here were men.¹¹⁹ As their identification with Cecil Rhodes' concession to preserve the political rights of 'civilised' men rather than 'White' men underlines, early

¹¹⁵Ibid. However, Howard Philips implies that Dr Abdurahman did not play much of a mediating role during the plague; he was certainly far more visible during the Spanish Flu epidemic (H Phillips, 'Black October.' The impact of the Spanish Influenza Epidemic of 1918 on South Africa, PhD, University of Cape Town, 1984, 58).

¹¹⁶See Nellie's estate papers for the condition of the house when she died (MOSC: 3349/53).

¹¹⁷Van Heyningen, Public health, 343.

¹¹⁸Bickford-Smith, et al, *Cape Town*, 27. See also Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, chapter 1.

¹¹⁹The photograph is reproduced in Bickford-Smith et al, *Cape Town*, 28. There are also few men in this photograph wearing Muslim attire. It is impossible to ascertain whether Abdullah was present from the photograph.

black political groupings were conceived in the minds of men, for men. Cape men had a limited franchise (educationally and in terms of property); this must be preserved. There was no question of demanding the extension of the franchise to black women, whose White counterparts were similarly unenfranchised.

The South African War ended in 1902 and the Treaty of Vereeniging precipitated the formation of the African Political Organisation (APO). In terms of the treaty, the ex-Boer republics were free to continue with their racist practices, which included disenfranchisement of black people; black leaders in the Cape felt betrayed by the Colonial Government. Named 'African' for geographical, not ethnic reasons,¹²⁰ the APO 'promoted Coloured ethnicity as a group identity that could unite communities of the ex-bonded. Contact between members of these communities had increased during the war'.¹²¹ Initially, the APO:

was motivated by the desire to obtain for Coloured people [ie, men] in the Northern Republics the political rights accorded to the non-Europeans in the Cape Colony. It soon extended its scope... Its aims were to promote unity among the Coloured people of South Africa, to secure better and more advanced education for their children, the registration of all Coloured voters [ie, men], and the defence and general promotion of the social, political and civic rights of the Coloured people.¹²²

Although Dr Abdurahman was not instrumental in establishing the APO, he was one of a new generation of political leaders, including Matt Fredericks and Advocate Sylvester Williams, who came to the fore when Fredericks stage-managed an effective coup d'état to remove the president, John Tobin, and vice-president W A Roberts. Dr Abdurahman was elected president in 1905. According to the *Cape Standard*:

Realising his educational qualifications, the officials of the APO, urged by the last [sic] Matt. J. Fredericks, persuaded this young man to accept the leadership of the

¹²⁰The African Political Organisation became, in fact, the political vehicle of people who called themselves Coloured.' (Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic pride*, 186).

¹²¹Ibid., 205.

¹²²E L Maurice, The development of policy in regard to the education of coloured pupils at the Cape, 1880-1940. PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1966, Appendix B.

organisation and there appeared on the political horizon a figure destined to play a prominent part in the affairs of men [sic].¹²³

In a sense, Cissie and Rosie were the 'princesses' of District Six: their father was remembered as:

a doctor, you know. Ook, en hy was gees die man. Sê soos a king, because ... soos ... die Botha [national president at the time] nou is, was hy gewees.¹²⁴

The historical literature of Coloured politics is profoundly androcentric and fails to recognise the contribution of women, including Nellie Abdurahman, in Coloured politics. From 1904 through Cissie's childhood, Abdullah Abdurahman would dominate the political stage in Cape Town. But, although Cissie was clearly influenced by her father in her political development and eventual choice of a political career, she was not only the younger daughter of Dr Abdurahman. She was also the younger daughter of Nellie Abdurahman, fighter for women's rights and president of the APO Women's Guild. Gender roles ensured that Cissie grew up largely in the company of her mother, sister and other women. In the process, she witnessed women's militancy which demonstrated to the young girl that women's role need not be restricted to the home, as her father maintained, somewhat ambiguously, given her mother's activism. Cissie learnt that women could be political activists and leaders. While acknowledging the importance of Dr Abdurahman, the following chapter foregrounds the influence of her mother on the childhood of Cissie Abdurahman.

¹²³ *Cape Standard*, 27 February 1940. For a fuller discussion of the origins of the APO, from the men's perspective, see Lewis, *Between the wire and the Wall*, and van der Ross, *The rise and decline of apartheid*.

¹²⁴ Mrs Tiefsa Adams, interviewed by unknown, nd (UCT M&A: BC 1004. Western Cape Oral History Project: District Six interviews, transcript). Translation: 'Doctor, you know. Also, and he was spirited, this man. One could say as a king, because, as Botha is now, so was he.'

Chapter Two

'The younger daughter of Nellie Abdurahman':

Childhood in the company of women

The souls of little children are marvellously delicate and tender things, and keep for ever the shadow that first falls on them, and this is the mother's or at best a woman's. There never was a great man who had not a great mother - it is hardly an exaggeration. The first six years of our life make us; all that is added later is veneer.¹

Cissie Abdurahman grew up in District Six in the early years of the twentieth century.² She was a girl, in an environment which was structured not only by race or class, but also, *inter alia*, by gender, age, and religion. As a young girl within an elite family, Cissie's life was structured in particular ways. She, her sister Rosie, their cousin Rukea and their friends the daughters of Yusuf and Waghieda Gool, unlike many black people of their age, experienced childhood as a particularly extended phase of life. Unlike most Muslim girls in Cape Town, their childhood was shaped not by domesticity, but by parental determination to educate them well beyond basic literacy. District Six politics and social intercourse were structured along gendered lines, and dominated by men, Dr Abdurahman above other men. The fact that Cissie was a daughter was profoundly significant, and ensured that she would experience District Six politics at her mother's, rather than her father's, side. Moreover, Cissie was a daughter of a father who wanted a son.³ Dr Abdurahman and the African Political Organisation helped to set the framework within which Cissie and her elder sister Rosie lived through childhood, sheltered from the worst effects of living in a racist society.

¹O Schreiner, *The Story of an African Farm*. Craighall: A.D. Donker, 1986, 181. Thanks to Helen Bradford for this reference.

²See, for instance, S Jeppie and C Soudien, eds. *The struggle for District Six: past and present*. Cape Town: buchu books, 1990. Most accounts of popular culture in District Six derive from living memories of people interviewed in the 1980s and 1990s. For collections of primary sources, see the District Six Museum, Cape Town; University of Cape Town, Manuscripts and Archives (hereafter UCT M&A): BC 1004, Transcripts of Western Cape Oral History Project, District Six Interviews. See also M S Jeppie, Aspects of popular culture and class expression in inner city Cape Town, c1939 - 1959. MA diss., University of Cape Town, 1990; L Fortune, *The house in Tyne Street: childhood memories of District Six*. Cape Town: Kwela, 1996; G Manuel, *District Six*. Cape Town: Longmans, 1967; N Ebrahim, *Noor's story. My life in District Six*. Cape Town: The District Six Museum Foundation, 1999; P Abrahams, *Tell freedom. Memories of South Africa*. London: Faber and Faber, 1954. A recent example is Y S Rassool, *District Six - Lest we forget. Recapturing subjugated cultural histories of Cape Town (1897-1956)*. Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 2000.

³Rustum Gool, in telephonic conversation with the author, 23 February 2002.

But Nellie Abdurahman's day-to-day life and work impacted on her daughters in a way their father's could not; taken for granted, her influence insinuated itself into the lives of her children. Dr Abdurahman was more of a rarefied patriarchal figure in this household, a disciplinarian when at home, but often absent on political business.⁴ Cissie's relationship with her father will come under the lens in the following chapter. Both this chapter and the next trace the primary and secondary educational trajectories of the Abdurahman daughters. Here I suggest that Cissie's mother, with whom, and under whose care she was classified within a gender-segregated community, and with whom, therefore, she spent a great deal of time as a child, was of central importance to her life. Cissie was in all crucial ways 'the younger daughter of Nellie Abdurahman'.

The main source for exploring Cissie Abdurahman's childhood in District Six at the turn of the century, is the *APO*, the newspaper dominated (although not officially edited) by her father, as President of the African Political Organisation (APO) from 1905.⁵ The *APO* was an important vehicle for the articulation of Dr Abdurahman's vision of the society he imagined for 'Coloured' people, in order to demonstrate their high standard of 'civilisation'. Women - as wives and mothers - and children had important roles to play in the construction, and the reflection, of this imagined community. Although there has been no historical research into conceptions of childhood in the Cape at this time, the evidence suggests that children in this community were viewed as small, uncivilised people who needed to be educated in the ways of civilisation, by their mothers in the first instance. Children - young people who were being educated, and who did not have to work to help support their families - who acquired valued skills, such as literacy - were treated with the same respect as were literate adults. This, at least, was the ideal encouraged by and reflected in the *APO*. While it published articles about the dangers of unfettered boyhood, girls appear as exemplars of the community's achievements, Abdurahman's relatives - including his daughters - among them.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ M. Adhikari, 'The product of civilization in its most repellent manifestation': Ambiguities in the racial perceptions of the APO (African Political Organization) 1909-23. *Journal of African History*, 38 (1997), 286. Dr Abdurahman presided over the APO from 1905 until his death in 1940. It was officially edited by the Secretary of the APO, Matt Fredericks, but 'it is ... clear that Dr Abdullah Abdurahman had by far the greatest influence in shaping the political outlook of the newspaper ...' Dr Abdurahman wrote most of the editorials.

The reflection of Cissie Abdurahman's childhood in the *APO* is thus severely distorted. Nevertheless, it is useful, because it reveals Dr Aburahman's expectation of the ideal family - up to which his wife and daughters would never live. Moreover, in celebrating celebrity children, the paper refers to some aspects of Cissie's 'lived' childhood, for instance pointing to her education, or her experience of public speaking, and the development of a confidence in her self, which would stand her in good stead. On the other hand, Cissie was a wilful child, but her rebellious side was silenced in the *APO*, and is far more difficult to trace, as is the application of parental discipline within the home. This thesis cannot examine in any adequate manner the pressures of being a daughter of Dr Abdurahman. Nevertheless, the following chapter, *inter alia*, will discuss the *APO*'s celebration of children's creativity, which, I suggest, inadvertently revealed cracks in the walls of the idealised community envisioned by Abdurahman. This chapter focuses on some of the more mundane traces of Cissie's childhood, largely through her involvement in the Women's Guild, an organisation over which her mother presided, under the umbrella of the *APO*.

Nellie Abdurahman introduced her daughters to circles of militant women, including Olive Schreiner and Ruth Alexander, both of whom were intimately involved in struggles for women's rights. Nellie Abdurahman's struggle for women's enfranchisement would draw Cissie into the same, and would provide her with the opportunity for her first public political performance decades later. Other women with whom the children came into contact were more conventional, Olive's elder sister, Ettie, being a case in point: a Christian woman deeply involved in the temperance movement.⁶ In addition, Nellie Abdurahman led her daughters into the politics of Coloured women supporting Coloured men, in the African Political Organisation Women's Guild. Here Cissie spent much time; as girls, she and Rosie were members of this organisation, whereas they were excluded from participation in the *APO* proper.

Within the ambit of the Women's Guild, Cissie was confronted with varied understandings of women's 'political' role, ranging from the ambiguities of support demanded by the men of the *APO* to the militance of women of the Orange Free State, discussed in the following chapter, who, in marching against passes, declared: 'We have done with pleading; we now

⁶K Schoeman, *Olive Schreiner: A woman in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1991; R First and A Scott. *Olive Schreiner: A biography*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1980.

demand'.⁷ Members of the APO Women's Guild were among the marchers, and their action was publicised in the *APO*. As a member of the Women's Guild, Cissie would come into contact with black women who fought for their rights as women on a political terrain thus far dominated by men. In the course of her childhood, Cissie would witness significant changes in the ways in which her father, as head of the APO, perceived the political role of women. By the end of Cissie's childhood, her father had accepted the concept of militant female activism, although he did not call for women's enfranchisement until much later.

Both Nellie and Abdullah Abdurahman fought for black children's educational rights. This endeavour impacted on the home environment and the APO and Women's Guild. As a 'non-European' child in early twentieth-century South Africa, Cissie's education was neither easy nor automatic, irrespective of her father's political clout or wealth. Her childhood was lived through a period of profound dis-ease in education, where racist segregation was cemented in legislation, and where education itself was a highly significant marker of political status and potential. The liberal Cape franchise, and the limited voting rights after Union, demanded it. For example, without literacy, black men could not qualify for the vote. Although they were girls, Cissie and Rosie were given the best education that could be provided for black children of wealthy parents in the early twentieth century, given the context of increasingly racist national educational policies.

The APO constructed women as mothers of 'the race'.⁸ In 1910, as president, Dr Abdurahman explicitly laid out the role he expected women to play. In the wake of the 'Great Betrayal' of Union, when hopes of a non-racial franchise had been dashed, he set out a plan to ensure the 'civilised' status of the racial caste which had so unjustly been denied citizenship in the Union of South Africa. Dr Abdurahman spoke first at the APO conference, which was exclusive to men, but later addressed women directly through the pages of the *APO*:

In my last presidential address I ventured to make certain recommendations: the cultivation of sound moral habits, the observance of truth and sobriety, and the [sic]

⁷J Wells, *We now demand! The history of women's resistance to pass laws in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993.

⁸C Hall, J Lewis, K McClelland and J Rendall, Introduction to Special issue on gender, nationalisms and national identities, *Gender and History* 5, 2 (Summer 1993), 159 - 164. See Terreblanche for a discussion of

making it our constant endeavour to brighten our homes and regard them as the best training ground possible for our future citizens. I ... referred to the weighty influence for good that women can exert in their homes. I trust that the members of the APO will read again and reflect on the advice therein.⁹

Dr Abdurahman detailed the precise responsibilities and duties of women as mothers and home-makers:

A mother's influence is incalculable. The character of children is far more dependent on that of the mother than that of the father... I must urge you women to cherish a high sense of duty. Avoid idleness, vice, and slatternliness. Keep your homes and yourselves pure and clean. Make them such that what I may call their homeliness may induce your husbands to regard their homes as their haven of rest and peace and comfort after their day's work ... If your homes are not clean and restful, your children will be morally dwarfed and deformed ... Every one of you who have the upbringing of children should so live that you ... may see in your offspring your proudest jewels. If such aims guide your actions and control your conduct, the coloured people of South Africa will become strong and enduring, and worthy of a proud place in the annals of the world. A woman's heart and life 'centred in the sphere of common duties', are an ornament to the nation, and if she instils into her children a love of work, and an overpowering sense of the dignity of labour, a love of duty, reverence for truth and virtue, and courage, she will have won the crown which never fades.¹⁰

Dr Abdurahman's perception of the role of mothers and by extension, fathers, is clear, although he had nothing specific to suggest to mothers to facilitate their responsibility for the care of children. The tensions between this vision of gendered domesticity in a racist milieu which increasingly was felt to demand different forms of political responses, and the life led by Nellie Abdurahman outside the home, in her welfare and more overtly political work, would be felt throughout Cissie's childhood.

the way in which Afrikaans magazines constructed Afrikaans women as mothers of the race (H. Terre Blanche, *Mothers of the nation: Afrikaans women's magazine advertisements in the 1940s*, *Kleio*, 28, (1996)

⁹APO, 4 June 1910.

¹⁰R E van der Ross, *Say it out loud. The APO presidential addresses and other major political speeches 1906 - 1940 of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman*. Bellville: Western Cape Institute for Historical Research, 1990, 34 -5.

It is possible to reconstruct the milieu into which Cissie was born and grew through childhood into adulthood. However, in order to understand Cissie's early political development, it is necessary to shift perspective from an empirical gathering of the few available facts (in itself essential, of course), to ask a question. If Cissie were alive today, how would she remember her earliest years? The answer would be less likely to focus on the facts that she learnt, and more on the nature of her relationship with the teacher; the thrill at recognition of acceptable behaviour, the frustration at being wrongly accused. She would remember the moments of emotional upliftment or humiliation. And although it is difficult to explore Cissie's childhood from this perspective, it is essential to try. Because even more than the content, it was the quality of her childhood that would influence the transmutation of Cissie Abdurahman into 'Councillor Mrs Z Gool.' This thesis touches on aspects of this childhood, predominantly as refracted through the pages of the *APO*.

Rustum Gool, grandson of Nellie and Abdullah Abdurahman, reflecting on his own childhood, pointed out that Dr Abdurahman had not left the bringing up of children to his wife, but that he been a strict disciplinarian:

A A watched over his two daughters and wielded the rod if not literally, certainly in a figurative manner of speaking.¹¹

I have no evidence of Nellie Abdurahman's views on discipline and corporal punishment. While we do not know what Nellie thought of mothering, her unconventional life as a British woman in South Africa, her unconventional embrace of her marriage and her place within the District Six community, her willingness to jettison Christianity for Islam, suggests that she may have had an unconventional approach to mothering, and to bringing up daughters.¹² However, this begs the question of whether an unconventional woman would encourage non-conformity to her chosen way of life among her children. How far either Cissie or Rosie would go to stretch the limits of their parents' approval, or to go beyond it, is a moot question, and one that I have been unable to answer from my analysis of available sources. On the other hand, Cissie and Rosie's status as 'celebrity' children seems to have allowed Cissie to thrive, although it may have suited Rosie's more reserved personality less.

¹¹R Gool, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2002.

I would argue that it is easier for an adult to take to the performance aspects of political leadership if she was encouraged to perform as a child; if she was brought up in an environment which allowed her to develop self-confidence, where her will had not been broken. It seems that, on the whole, Cissie had such a childhood. She certainly would have tasted the thrill of performing to an appreciative audience, as the APO constituency unreservedly applauded the achievements of their leader's children. While the content of these performances was significant in pointing to issues that concerned the young Cissie, perhaps more important was their power to build confidence in the young girl. She did indeed remember key moments, which related to her precocious intelligence. In addition to recalling her father's study, lined with books, Cissie proudly boasted, decades later, of her childhood writing that had been published in the *APO*.¹³

Cissie's childhood taught her the limits of conventional designations of gendered spheres of activity. On the one hand, the APO, under the leadership of her father, upheld gender roles restricting women to subordinate roles of child-rearing and husband-support, but this was seen to be extended appropriately into social work within the community. Women's role was to civilise, and this should be done within families and within cultural organisations. The APO saw social welfare as an extension of the nurturing role, as long as women remembered that their priority was always the home. On the other hand, Cissie watched her mother work within these constraints, and subtly redefine them. Mrs Abdurahman became the president of an organisation, carefully defined as apolitical, which nevertheless did 'political' things.¹⁴ The APO Women's Guild was a large organisation, with up to 70 branches at one time. Nellie presided with flair and authority over meetings of both women and men; she proved herself to be a leader demanding respect, especially when speaking about education, a profoundly political concern.

Nellie Abdurahman's influence on her daughters has been ignored in the literature, as has her political work, which initiated Cissie into her first political organisation, and presented a

¹²For a description of how a different British immigrant mother disciplined a different daughter, in the nineteenth century Cape, see R Rive, Olive Schreiner (1855 - 1920): A biographical and critical study, PhD thesis, Oxford University, 1974, 41 - 42.

¹³Unfortunately, a paucity of primary sources such as personal letters does not permit us to identify the books in Dr Abdurahman's study, and those which Cissie would read as a child. Cf Schoeman, *Olive Schreiner*, 66 ff for some of the books to which the young Olive Schreiner was exposed.

¹⁴See below.

role model for her to observe. Mogamed Ajam has recognised that Nellie Abdurahman influenced her husband through her passion for educational reform. He does not discuss parental influences on the children.¹⁵ Historians have not recognised a more conventionally political role for Nellie, and only R E van der Ross even mentions her leadership of the APO Women's Guild.¹⁶ Yet in addition to her position on the board of the Cape Town and Wynberg Board of Aid, Nellie was active in more conventionally recognised political formations, whether in public support of her husband, leading the APO Women's Guild, or demanding women's enfranchisement from within the Women's Enfranchisement League.¹⁷

Albert Lodge provided the setting for Cissie Abdurahman's earliest political education. Cissie and Rosie Abdurahman grew up in a politically conscious family, and, as in other homes of the black elite, political and other debate seems to have been encouraged within the family.¹⁸ The Abdurahman home would gain a reputation as a site of political debate, but many homes served this purpose. In District Six in the early to mid-twentieth century, activists learned their politics in the home, as well as through their interaction with the broader community.¹⁹ It seems that, within such families, children were encouraged to think for themselves, to read, to discuss, to work out their own positions in the world. At least, this was the case in those families from which political leaders later emerged, including the Abdurahman and Gool families; the latter would produce three leaders in a family of activists, Janub (Jane), Goolam, and their elder brother Abdul.²⁰

Relationships within the home expanded from those of the immediate family, to far wider circles of friendship, extended family and those eager to engage in intellectual and political debate. The Abdurahman home operated in a similar fashion to the European salons which, controlled by women, providing a congenial space for the development of Enlightenment

¹⁵M Ajam, *The raison d'être of the Muslim Mission Primary School in Cape Town and environs from 1860 to 1980 with special reference to the role of Dr A Abdurahman in the modernisation of Islam-oriented schools*. PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1986, 191.

¹⁶Van der Ross, *Say it out loud*, 9.

¹⁷University of Cape Town, Manuscripts and Archives (hereafter UCT M&A) BCZA 83/30-35, Abdurahman family collection.

¹⁸Within the Gool family, for example, family members disagreed within the home, but were careful to present a united front in other company (Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001).

¹⁹M Adhikari, *Let us live for our children: the Teachers' League of South Africa, 1913 - 40*. Cape Town: UCT Press and buchu books, 1993, 181. The same point is made in H Villa Vicencio, *Colour, class and constitutionalism*, MA diss., University of Cape Town, 1993.

²⁰Jane and Goolam would become prominent in the Unity Movement, while Abdul was a leader within the South African Indian Congress in the 1920s.

ideas.²¹ However, whereas they tended to be the preserve of women, in this case, both Abdullah and Nellie Abdurahman presided, in different company, at different times. Albert Lodge may have been the first 'salon' in Cape Town.²² The roots for what were to become the famous 'Gool parties' may be located in the household in which Cissie grew up, but the household of Yusuf and Waghieda Gool was also a centre of 'culture' and debate.²³

Olive Schreiner was one of a number of influential, militant women who visited the Abdurahman home from time to time, and who provided role models for the young Abdurahman daughters.²⁴ Olive and the much younger Ruth Alexander, wife of Morris Alexander, liberal politician and colleague of Dr Abdurahman, shared a close relationship; Ruth seems to have become friendly with Cissie only after Olive's death in 1920.²⁵ Ruth was older than Cissie, but oral sources have confirmed that they were close friends by the time Cissie was a young adult.²⁶ Relationships between women have been profoundly ignored in South African history. The precise character of Nellie's, or Cissie's, relationships with Olive Schreiner or Olive's sister Ettie Stakesby-Lewis (who lived in Cape Town and whose life was celebrated in the *APO*, and for whom the Stakesby-Lewis Hostel was named), and Cissie's friendship with Ruth, cannot be ascertained from extant documentary sources.²⁷ Oral sources confirm that such relationships existed, and that Cissie spent time in the company of these women.²⁸

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For the Abdurahman children, the political and cultural gatherings that took place in Albert Lodge challenged notions of a rigid boundary between 'public' and 'private' politics. Their home was a place where Cissie and Rosie learnt to negotiate this interface. It was important in preparing Cissie for a political career, because it provided an informal setting, where she could express views relatively freely with a diverse range of highly intelligent and talented people. For Cissie, the home was a place in which racial categories were simultaneously insignificant and highly painful, where 'culture' and education, and the ability to debate, were respected. Cissie observed, and later participated in, conversations between her

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As a child, it was in her home that Cissie learnt about the political contradictions she would later fight to resolve. On the one hand, the politics of race were played out in her own family; on the other, one of these contradictions concerned gender politics. A tension existed between the ability of women to engage in political debate within the house, and Dr Abdurahman's public pronouncements as president of the APO, about the appropriate role of women in the Coloured community. At the same time, Albert Lodge provided a safe setting in which the children were encouraged to read, to discuss, to learn and to show off their talents, perhaps around the tea table, after Dr Abdurahman had rung the bell for tea.³³ Ultimately, the elitist, upper-middle class character of Albert Lodge was a reminder that Dr Abdurahman was not in search of a classless society.

In 1904, Abdullah Abdurahman stood for local government. Confirming his popularity as a political leader, he was elected to represent District Six by the men of the ward (women did not have the vote at this time),³⁴ and was returned at every election for the rest of his life, bar one.³⁵ His role and influence as the first black man to sit on the Council (and later also the Provincial Council) was certainly extremely important as a role model to Cissie Abdurahman. Her father's interventions through the Council in the field of education were also significant for his daughters.³⁶ Issues such as the unfairness of the Council's racism which prevented Dr Abdurahman's election as Mayor, despite his chairmanship of numerous committees for many years, would have outraged his family.³⁷ Uncovering the details of Dr Abdurahman's career as a Councillor are beyond the scope of this project, and

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there has been no historical analysis of his City Council career on which one might draw. Its significance may well be discovered by future research, but for the moment it seems that more relevant for Cissie's political development was the fact that her father was elected president of the African Political Organisation in 1905, which drew her mother, her sister and herself into the heart of Coloured politics.

It is clear that one of the key concerns of the APO, and of Abdullah and Nellie Abdurahman, was the fight for black children's right to education. Soon after Nellie and Abdullah's arrival in Cape Town, they had witnessed the Cape government's attempts to legislate educational segregation. However, the South African war had intervened, and it was only in 1905 that the Cape Government's Minister for Education, Dr Muir, saw the School Board Act through the Cape Parliament.³⁸ With this Act, primary and secondary education in the Cape was segregated racially, with massive resources allocated to White education, now compulsory. The government attempted to leave black education to the Mission schools, which provided poor education, and then only to Standard IV.³⁹ The Act proposed curriculum changes which would provide Coloured children with 'technical' rather than intellectual education.⁴⁰ Dr Abdurahman spear-headed the APO's campaign against the School Board Bill, which had profound implications for the education of his own children.

One of Dr Abdurahman's early public interventions was to protest against this Bill. In late February 1905, he led a meeting of more than 500 people:

Extraordinary interest in the subject of education was displayed last night at a mass meeting of coloured people held in Clifton school, in District 6.

Abdurahman was 'received with loud cheering'. He declared:

³⁸Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, 30 - 34.

³⁹As the report for the Superintendent General of Education (1914) noted: 'it may be said that the education of European children is the chief duty of the School Boards, and the schooling of Non-Europeans is chiefly attended to by missionary churches on a voluntary basis' (cited in Ajam, *Raison d'etre*, 179).

⁴⁰A separate syllabus was introduced in 1921. It was 'a cross between the primary syllabus for European schools and that for Native schools' (The Superintendent-General of Education, cited in M Horrell, *The education of the Coloured community in South Africa, 1652 - 1970*. Johannesburg: South African Institute for Race Relations, 1970, 41). This proved unworkable and was abolished after 'about a decade' (Ibid).

Two schools at which I received my education have closed their doors to other coloured children, and nothing has been substituted to take their place ... accomplished men and women can only be produced by education...⁴¹

He explained the implications of the Bill, noting that it placed "almost insurmountable obstacles" in the way of compulsory education or in the establishment of non-denominational schools for Coloureds, since they were not eligible for state aid...⁴²

Abdurahman led a deputation to government, which had a limited degree of success. As he had requested, two-thirds of the School Board members would be elected by rate payers. The APO would try to mobilise voters to make use of this, and elect Board members who would represent the Coloured people.

Nellie Abdurahman gave an interview decades later, in which she reflected on her early years in the country:

What had impressed Mrs Abdurahman on her arrival [in South Africa] was the fact that no secular public schools existed for coloured children, who, if they did not attend Mission Schools, few in number, were deprived of the opportunity of attending school at all. Then, as the years passed by, the question of schooling for her own two daughters presented a problem.⁴³

The Abdurahman girls were of an age to be educated around the time that the School Board Act came into force. No public school in Cape Town offered education to matriculation standard for black children.

Thus far, within the family (both Abdullah's father's and mother's sides), it was the boys who had been educated professionally. As males, they were also the ones to receive Islamic education in Cairo. As Ajam notes:

⁴¹UCT M&A: BCZA 83/30, Abdurahman family collection, microfilm, reel 1.

⁴²Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, 33.

⁴³Nellie Abdurahman, interviewed by Zelda Friedlander, *Spotlight* 12 March 1948, copy in UCT M&A: BC 580, Zelda Friedlander papers. Everett mistakenly attributes this to Abdullah, not Nellie: 'Although he had been educated in Scotland, Dr Abdurahman was determined that his daughters should not be educated abroad. When the question of their education arose, Dr Abdurahman said that they were South Africans and would be educated in South Africa' (Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 2).

The 'respectable class of Moslems' with independent sources of income and autonomous in the means of its income had the means to ensure a satisfactory education for their sons [sic] in Mecca, Cairo or London.⁴⁴

In the new context, Abdullah and Nellie's quest for universal education recognised the importance of educating girls as well as boys. The fact that they had only daughters made such an endeavour personal.

In 1907, Nellie fought to have Rosie and Cissie accepted into the Good Hope Seminary School in Cape Town. They were denied access, so in an action reflecting her belief in the active participation of women in public matters, Nellie demanded a response from the Minister for Education in the Cape Parliament. He promised to 'make some inquiry into the probable attitude of the School Board in the matter.' After some time, Nellie received a reply:

Dr Muir has had the opportunity of a talk with the Chairman of the Board on the subject, and finds that his attitude is practically similar to that of the Managers of the Good Hope Seminary, and apparently his view is likely to be the view of the Board.

Dr Muir regrets therefore that for the present he cannot give any helpful suggestion.⁴⁵

For the time being, the children had to be tutored at home.

Meanwhile, Cissie's and Rosie's lives were being framed by their father's leadership of the African Political Organisation, but they were never members. The APO was an organisation of, and for, men only. As a 'political' organisation, it was primarily concerned with the franchise - not democratising it, but extending it to Coloured males in the northern provinces who were excluded from it. After the South African war, the Treaty of Vereeniging (1902) had retained the status quo, which meant that the former Boer republics' racist policies continued. Later, the APO's quest was to protect Coloured men's rights at Union. The membership consisted of a minority of Muslims, and a majority of Christians. In both religious traditions, patriarchal governance was implicit and women were not expected to take a leading role. Women did not sit on the executive of the APO, nor did they attend its

⁴⁴Ajam, *Raison d'être*, 172.

⁴⁵UCT M&A: BC 506, Waradea Abdurahman collection, A1.1, Letter from Department of Public Education, Cape Town, to Mrs Abdurāhman, 25 October 1907.

conferences as delegates.⁴⁶ It was highly unusual, and considered inappropriate, for women to attend APO branch meetings. Although there was nothing in the APO constitution specifically to exclude women, those who did attend were clearly objects of concern and attracted censure.⁴⁷

The APO Women's Guild was founded in Nellie's home in 1909.⁴⁸ The *APO* reported that:

a number of ladies met at the residence of Mrs Abdurahman, for the purpose of forming an association, the aim of which would be to work towards uplifting and educating the women, to assist the men in their work, and to take a general interest in the welfare of the Coloured people.⁴⁹

The Women's Guild has not been recognised as a political organisation in the historical literature. Gavin Lewis does not mention it, subsuming the women's activities under those of the men.⁵⁰ R E van der Ross refers to it in the 'biographical introduction' to his compilation of Dr Abdurahman's presidential speeches, but does not discuss it in his history of black politics.⁵¹ He suggests that the Women's Guild:

was in a sense a forerunner of later ideas and organisations which espoused the rights of women ... Bearing in mind that few Coloured women had even a standard six education at that time, and that many had no schooling at all, the Women's Guild no doubt became a popular and important social and educational forum for women ...⁵²

The Guild's popularity is evident from the fact that it soon expanded to over 70 branches within two years. The extent to which it espoused women's as opposed to Coloured rights is unclear, but even as an adjunct to the APO, it was clearly a political organisation.

⁴⁶It was only in 1928, in the context of calls for the enfranchisement of women, that the organisation agreed to permit women to attend conferences and to vote for, and stand for, the executive (*Cape Times*, 13 April 1928: 'Feminists win through'). Only one male delegate to the APO conference 'refused to sit in the same room with women'.

⁴⁷One unnamed woman insisted on accompanying her husband to all meetings. This uncomfortable fact was pointed out in the *APO*, which noted with relief that she would be able to join the soon-to-be-formed Women's Guild - and stop coming to the men's meetings (*APO*, 17 July 1909).

⁴⁸Richard van der Ross mistakenly dates the establishment of the Guild to 1911 (van der Ross, *Say it out loud*, 11).

⁴⁹*APO*, 7 May 1910.

⁵⁰Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*.

⁵¹R E van der Ross, *The rise and decline of apartheid. A study of political movements among the Coloured people of South Africa, 1880-1985*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1986.

The women of the Guild were expected to support the men in their political endeavours, for example, by raising funds through social events. This, however, was represented as apolitical, despite the purpose of the fund-raising.

At the Guild's inaugural meeting, Nellie was elected chairwoman and president. Her initial election may have been related to her husband's powerful position in the APO, as well as her relatively advanced education, but her annual re-election demonstrates the recognition of her leadership ability. The APO Women's Guild (Cape Town Branch) had three main objectives. It aimed:

to promote unity among the Coloured women of British South Africa, and to aid and assist towards the uplifting of the race; to obtain better and higher education for children, and to take an interest generally in all educational matters; to assist and encourage as far as possible the work carried on by the men members of the African Political Organisation.⁵³

Membership was open to 'all coloured women born in South Africa, or who have adopted it as their own.' The designation 'Coloured' was clearly flexible, given Nellie's pale skin. To underline the fact that the Guild was not exclusive to adult women, it stated that the entrance fee was one shilling for an adult, 'but there shall be no charge for girls under 16 years of age. The subscription fee shall be one penny per week for all members.' The Guild would meet 'once a week for the purpose of needlework, dress cutting and making, reading, etc', and 'every two months, the Guild shall meet for social discussion, and for review of work done.'⁵⁴ Cissie and Rosie were included in the work and activities of the Women's Guild from its inception. Their names crop up regularly in the 'Women's Column' of the *APO*, and in other reports of the Guild's activities. As a significant influence on the Cissie's political development, it may be useful to sketch the history of the organisation and its relationship to the APO.

⁵²Van der Ross, *Say it out loud*, 11 - 12.

⁵³*APO*, 21 May 1910.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

The Guild met on Tuesday evenings, initially in the Abdurahman home, and later in the APO hall, in Longmarket Street.⁵⁵ It is likely that Rosie and Cissie sat in on these meetings, initially observing and later participating in the discussions, in addition to learning various home-making skills. The *APO* represented the Guild as something of a social or cultural group - 'Instruction has been given in the different branches of needlework, and once a month a social gathering has taken place'.⁵⁶ But as women do when they get together, these women would undoubtedly have discussed issues relevant to their lives over their needlework, and this would have included formal political concerns. For example, shortly after its inception, the Guild raised more than £40 to send Dr Abdurahman and APO secretary Matt Fredericks to England as part of the deputation to plead for the abolition of the colour bar in the Union legislation.⁵⁷ They did not do this blindly, but clearly engaged in debate around this critical issue.⁵⁸

The first mention of the Women's Guild in the *APO* is in a revealing advertisement for the 'Grand Concert' which the Guild held in aid of the Draft Constitution Fund, on the evening of 7 June 1909.⁵⁹ Under the heading 'Amusements', the *APO* reported that:

the great interest taken by ourselves [the men of the APO] in the promotion of the Fund for defraying the expenses incurred in fighting the Draft Constitution, is equalled by that evinced by the Ladies' Guild ... On Monday night ... they organised a concert on behalf of the Fund ... The weather was inclement in the extreme, but ... there was a large attendance. A most excellent programme was arranged.⁶⁰

Nellie was among the vocalists. Her children did not perform, although they were doubtless in the audience. The report signifies the classification of women's activities as less important than those of men: they were 'amusements'. It also distinguished very clearly between 'us' the APO, which consisted of men, and 'them', the women of the Guild.

Having raised funds for the all-male deputation, '[a] send-off entertainment was given to the delegates on the eve of their departure for England.'⁶¹ A crowd gathered to see the

⁵⁵ *APO*, 7 May 1910.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ UCT M&A: BCZA 83/30, Abdurahman family collection, microfilm, reel 1.

⁵⁸ For details of the campaign, see Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, 46 - 57.

⁵⁹ *APO*, 5 June 1909.

⁶⁰ *APO*, 19 June 1909.

⁶¹ *APO*, 7 May 1910.

deputation off at the Alfred Docks: 'The climax came on Wednesday afternoon. ... Everybody of importance was there ... Amongst the ladies ... were, of course, Mrs Abdurahman and children'.⁶² At every major event involving the Doctor, Mrs Abdurahman could be seen, normally accompanied by her children.

Nellie wrote to her husband while he was on the ship returning from England in August 1909. Her letter provides rare insights into their relationship.⁶³ The letter was formal in style, although it was addressed to 'my dearest husband.' Nellie reported on the stormy winter weather, noting that 'all the rooms in the house are leaking very badly. I can do nothing at present as the rain does not cease long enough to enable the Man to repair the roof.' She goes on to demonstrate confidence and competence in running the home - and Abdullah's financial concerns - in his absence. As a woman not legally married, Nellie could comfortably 'serve as agent for her husband.'⁶⁴

Nellie's letter revealed her husband's sense of his patriarchal role in the family: 'I have attended to all your orders so that I trust when you return you will find all things to your satisfaction.' However, she then demonstrated that she was quite capable of taking matters into her own hands: 'The thing I have done which I hope you agree with, that is I have transferred some of your fire assurances to the "general" by doing so I have saved something on the premiums.' While running the financial affairs efficiently, Nellie was careful not to upset her husband's sense of his own role within the family, as she 'hope[d]' for her husband's approval after the fact. She also dealt with matters of rent, and with non-payment of rates, on one of Abdullah's father's properties. Then follows the only mention of the family, and the physical strain of dealing with Abdullah's concerns as well as her own is revealed in her uneven syntax and handwriting:

We are all well so far, considering the cold wet weather. Sometimes I feel rather tired but the thought of your return [illegible] me up and I [illegible] that I shall be relieved of some [of] the work then.⁶⁵

⁶² APO, 19 June 1909.

⁶³ UCT M&A: BC 506, Waradea Abdurahman collection, A1.2, Letter, Nellie to Abdullah, 10 August 1909.

⁶⁴ I Geffen, *The laws of South Africa regarding women and children*. Johannesburg: Esson, 1928, 65.

⁶⁵ Waradea Abdurahman collection.

Nellie then reported on the state of the *APO*, and her success in increasing the number of subscribers. She ends, 'With fondest love and kisses from your affectionate wife Nellie.'⁶⁶ The letter contains no specific remarks about the children.

Despite the fact that the deputation failed to persuade the British government to remove the 'colour bar' from the South Africa Act, the welcome home was tremendous.⁶⁷ The Guild organised a reception, simultaneously an important political gathering and a cultural showcase.⁶⁸ As the women were busy raising funds to support the retention of the qualified male franchise, they may well have discussed their own lack of political power as women. At this time, Nellie's involvement in the Women's Enfranchisement League would have influenced her discussions with women of the Guild, and *vice versa*. The WEL was only asking for 'the granting of the vote to [women] on the same terms as Men',⁶⁹ but Nellie, along with Olive Schreiner and a few others, saw the need to extend the WEL's self-chosen brief to campaign for the black women's vote.⁷⁰ These issues would doubtless have been discussed by the Guild women, while 'laying out the tea'.

The Guild struggled to be taken seriously, partly because its focus on fund-raising tended to impart on the organisation a distinctly sociable air. Typically, under 'Amusements', the *APO* reported on one of the 'usual six-weekly social[s] in the Temperance Hall ... There was a large gathering present, and a most enjoyable evening was spent ... Amongst the most energetic workers were Mrs Abdurahman, president of the Guild'. The *APO* 'men's branch' ensured that the relationship between the Guild and the *APO* was always clear. The Guild was there to support; the *APO* to lead and patronise and do the important political work. The senior vice-president of the *APO* 'said a few encouraging words to the Guild', while the chairman of the Cape Town Branch 'also spoke a few words, saying that he thought that women could be a great assistance to their husbands.' Nellie thanked them for their 'sympathetic remarks,' but then went on to explain that the purpose of the Guild was not merely to support the men:

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ For details of the campaign, see, for instance, Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, chapter 2.

⁶⁸ *APO*, 7 May 1910.

⁶⁹ Women's Enfranchisement League, *First Annual Report*, 8 April 1908.

⁷⁰ In 1910, Ruth Alexander wrote an open letter of encouragement to the 'women of the *APO*', at the request of Abdurahman (*APO*, 24 December 1910.) It is unclear whether she first became friendly with the family through her husband's connection as City Councillor and MP, or through suffrage activities.

She explained that the object of the Guild was two-fold, namely, to uplift coloured womanhood, and to help the men.⁷¹

The APO envisaged a central role for women, but only in their particular sphere, and as auxiliaries to men. The organisation did not engage with the issue of women's full humanity. Dr Abdurahman concluded his 1909 presidential address with these words:

In conclusion, let me say that civil liberty and slavery are incompatible and irreconcilable, and if any section of a community be deprived of a part of their freedom, they become enslaved in proportion as they are deprived of their freedom.⁷²

Abdurahman was talking about himself and other black men; this argument was not extended to women at this time. Moreover, when Dr Abdurahman gave his speech in 1910 about the domestic duty of women, to civilise husbands and children, he did not specify how the women of the APO Women's Guild were to fulfil this role in addition to their duty to support the men of the APO, primarily by fund-raising, and 'providing delicious eats' at functions. The importance that Dr Abdurahman placed on 'the home' as women's place contrasts with Nellie's full use of Albert Lodge for functions that were not on the APO's domestic feminine agenda. Holding meetings for the Franchise Department of WCTU in her home may have been one example; founding the APO Women's Guild was certainly another.

Although the Women's Guild never styled itself as a suffrage organisation, women's political status was certainly discussed:

... Dr Elizabeth Hoggen gave a very interesting address to the coloured women under the auspices of the Guild. The lecturer confined her remarks to the notable coloured women of America. It is hoped that in the near future a lecture would be delivered on the notable coloured women of South Africa.⁷³

Nellie chaired this meeting, in which 'Dr Hoggen concluded an interesting address by advising the Coloured people of South Africa to unite, be proud of their colour and race, and to educate their children.'⁷⁴ Furthermore, evidence that the women of the Guild were

⁷¹APO, 3 July 1909.

⁷²APO, 5 June 1909.

⁷³APO, 5 May 1910. No such lecture was given.

⁷⁴APO, 21 May 1910.

discussing the issue of women's suffrage among themselves is revealed in the Guild's participation in a debate in June 1910, between members of the Guild and the APO. The subject was 'Should women have votes?'.⁷⁵ Nellie was not one of the speakers, but there can be no doubt that her own expertise and interest in the issue of women's enfranchisement fed into the discussions that preceded it. In his concluding remarks, Dr Abdurahman pointedly stated that, if he had to vote based solely on the arguments presented that evening, he would support the women's vote. He did not commit himself to supporting women's enfranchisement *per se*. However, the fact that the APO was prepared to hold such a debate at all was a step towards a wider acceptance of political rights for women.

As part of its agenda of 'raising' the Coloured people, the APO encouraged western cultural activities. In March 1910, the Women's Guild's continued to support the political work of the APO, by raising funds to send delegates to the APO Conference in Port Elizabeth. The Guild organised a tea party for this purpose, which was reported, again under the heading 'Amusements'. If Nellie were a key organiser, as president, it is not surprising that she would have run social events according to her own family's traditions.⁷⁶ Nellie and Mrs Cupido 'sang two songs each while Mr Wooding presided at the piano. Mrs Abdurahman also gave a short but interesting address, in which she praised the committee, and encouraged the women to assist their husbands in the social and political work.'⁷⁷ This combination of 'culture' and political address or discussion became the format of most fund-raisers and public meetings.

In addition to needlework classes on Wednesday afternoons⁷⁸ and other meetings of the Women's Guild, Cissie and Rosie found time to have fun. Excluded from the popular male sports of cricket and rugby, the girls played tennis, went to the beach at Oudekraal with their friends, often their cousin Rukea, or the Gool daughters Zobeida and Gadija (the much younger Minnie tagged along), and went skating at the local rink.⁷⁹ Social activities, however, always had political overtones, at times overt. In January, 1910, two men were excluded from the local skating rink. Of these, 'one [was refused entrance] on account of his

⁷⁵ APO, 4 June 1910.

⁷⁶ The ritual of Christmas Dinner is just one example: see Selim Gool, interviewed on videotape by Gairoonisa Paleker, University of Cape Town Centre for Popular Memory, nd.

⁷⁷ APO, 26 Mar 1910.

⁷⁸ See, for instance, APO, 13 August 1910.

colour and the other on account of his creed.' The Women's Guild recorded its 'emphatic protest against [the] discrimination between coloured people either on account of the shade of their complexion or their creed'. Rosie and Cissie participated in what may have been their first overt political act against racial discrimination: they boycotted the rink. 'Already a number of people, including Messrs. Wilson, Lane, Williams, Mrs Abdurahman's children and a number of others have withdrawn their patronage.'⁸⁰ The tone of *APO* reports was significant in encouraging the development of self-confidence among the children of the APO members. Their act was not belittled because they were young, but was accorded respect as a valid political action. Reports always used the same tone when referring to achievements - whether political or cultural - of children as well as adults.

Cissie's childhood confidence was further enhanced by Walter Wooding⁸¹, whose wife was on the Guild's executive. He played a key role in the development of musical talent among the APO's constituency. In 1909, he founded the Western Province Amateur Musical Society and taught the theory and practice of the pianoforte. Among his pupils were the Abdurahman children, and Cissie learned a skill that she would value throughout her adult life, when she had a home and a piano of her own.⁸² Both Rosie and Cissie had inherited their mother's ability to sing, and the children joined their mother in taking singing lessons, learning to sing and play firmly within a western European cultural tradition.⁸³

The first reference in the *APO* to the musical talents of the children was a performance by the Western Province Amateur Musical Society in April, 1910. On this occasion Cissie did not perform, but Rosie sang 'Queen of the Night' (it was not considered necessary to name the composer, so familiar was the music).⁸⁴ By the following year, both Cissie and Rosie had developed their skills at the piano such that they were ready to perform publicly, in fund-raising concerts organised by the APO:

⁷⁹ Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001; *APO*, 15 January 1910.

⁸⁰ *APO*, 15 January 1910.

⁸¹ Walter Wooding played a significant role in encouraging the musical talents of District Six, of both children and adults. He ran a piano school, where he taught youngsters both theoretical and practical skills. He also founded the Western Province Amateur Musical Society in 1909, of which Nellie was a patron.

⁸² As an adult, Cissie's piano had probably been given to her by Nellie, as the latter's estate inventory did not mention a piano (Master's Office, Supreme Court, Cape Town (hereafter MOSC): 3349/53). For a first hand description of Cissie's home in the 1940s, see P Podbrey, *White girl in search of the Party*. Pietermaritzburg: Hadedu Books, 1993.

⁸³ *Cape Standard*, 27 February 1940.

⁸⁴ This is the first confirmation that Waradea was known as Rosie by this time.

... Mrs Abdurahman ... sang in excellent style ... the Misses Abdurahman and Mr R Wooding took part in pianoforte duets.⁸⁵

On this occasion, Nellie sang three songs, ranging from high opera to Edwardian popular culture: from Tancredi's 'Overture' to 'Under the Deodar', and 'Gondola Dreams', while the girls' piano duet was Valse's 'Maimez-Vous'. Typically, there was no question of performing anything that did not derive from western Europe.

Meanwhile, Nellie continued her efforts to get her children into school. Everett records that 'although both girls were bright and capable they were refused entrance to all the better schools in Cape Town'.⁸⁶ I have been unable to discover evidence pointing to the identity of other schools which denied them access. However, their father was largely responsible for the establishment of the first second class public school in Cape Town for Coloured children.⁸⁷ Cissie and Rosie would be able to attend this school for part of their secondary education.

In April, 1911, the School Board decided to remove from 'European' schools any children who were not 'pure' white, by establishing a third-class school in District Six 'for slightly tinged [sic] children'.⁸⁸ On 27 June, Nellie presided over a Women's Guild meeting. Children's education was considered to be the province of women as well as men, and it provided the Guild with the opportunity to engage, as equals, with the men of the APO.⁸⁹ In fact, a number of 'men's branches' were reprimanded for not supporting the educational work of the women.⁹⁰ The Cape Town branch of the Guild, whose members attended the meeting en masse, discussed this issue, which it condemned unanimously:

⁸⁵*APO*, 21 October 1911.

⁸⁶Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 2; Rustum Gool, E-mail read at the dedication of the Cissie Gool Plaza, 3 July 2001.

⁸⁷Schools going as far as Standard IV were third class, second class schools (Secondary) went to standard VIII, while first class (High) schools completed the matriculation syllabus.

⁸⁸*APO*, 1 July 1911.

⁸⁹See, for instance, *APO*, 9 September 1911, where Mr Ficks, the secretary of the men's branch in Hopefield gave a speech to the local Women's Guild. He stated that, 'he thought that one of the first things which required the attention of the Guild was that of education.'

⁹⁰See, for instance, *APO*, 23 September 1911: the Robertson branch of the APO was told 'it behoved the men to do what they could to support the women in the good work they had undertaken.' A similar complaint was made of Zeekoeivlei (*APO*, 12 August 1911).

[A]s an immoral and unchristian step. Furthermore, the branch has made investigations, and has found that there has been no desire on the part of the inhabitants of the district for the establishment of such a school.⁹¹

The branch resolved to 'send a protest to the School Board', to set up a petition against opening such a school, and 'to ask for a 3A school for coloured children without regard to the degree of colour in their skin.'⁹² In an editorial, the *APO* condemned the proposal on grounds of unworkability and complication, rather than on moral grounds, although it clearly agreed with the Women's Guild's stand. The *APO* reported on a deputation of men that interviewed the School Board. It is unclear whether the women sent a deputation of their own, but the School Board resolved:

[t]hat in view of the representations made in regard to differentiation in the matter of colour on the part of the Coloured people in District Six, that this Board resolves that beyond making provision for the needs of the Coloured children in the Cape District in accordance with the public funds available for that purpose, the Board will lay down no rule in regard to admission to such a school.⁹³

The previous year, the *APO* had announced the imminent opening of a '2nd Class Public School for Coloured Children'.⁹⁴ The subject had been discussed at the APO Congress:

The President told of the experience of the people of Cape Town. After much agitation they had got an A2 [secondary, ie, to Standard 8] school. But it started with only thirteen pupils, and they in Cape Town were now doing their best to increase the number of pupils and make the school a success.⁹⁵

The school, which was ultimately named Trafalgar, was initially run in a small building in Chapel Street. Abdurahman recalled that '[a]t first it was a hard uphill struggle to even procure the required number of children to keep the school open.' Matt Fredericks apparently sent his five-year old son, and paid fees for him and two other children just to keep the school open.⁹⁶ According to one source, '[s]even of its first class of eleven students were Gools', and, almost certainly, two of them were the daughters of Nellie and Abdullah

⁹¹*APO*, 1 July 1911.

⁹²*Ibid.*

⁹³*APO*, 15 July 1911, 12 August 1911.

⁹⁴*APO*, 15 January 1910 (emphasis in original).

⁹⁵*APO*, 9 April 1910.

Abdurahman.⁹⁷ Part of the problem with educating the children of District Six was poverty which prevented parents from affording school fees, and which required the work of children to supplement family incomes. Specific problems facing girls are addressed in the following chapter.

The Cape Town branch of the Women's Guild planned to convene a conference, and also decided to hold a bazaar, 'in order to provide funds for [a] proposed Industrial Exhibition of women's work.'⁹⁸ This was a departure for the Guild from fund-raising to support the men's work. Among those who volunteered to conduct stalls were 'the members of the Junior Saving Class.'⁹⁹ Rosie and Cissie were actively involved in the bazaar, which was held in the Masonic Hall on Saturday, 11 March, 1911.¹⁰⁰

'Senator the Hon WP Schreiner, KC' gave the opening address. He pointed out the difference between the APO and the Guild. The latter was apolitical: it 'deals only with social problems affecting the coloured people of South Africa.' It is unclear whether Schreiner was merely describing the status quo, or pointing out to the women the desired limits of their organisation. He said that whereas the APO, as a political body 'was not supposed to be a friend of everybody', this was not so for the Guild:

[t]he Women's Guild aimed at raising the women and children - taking them in hand - and it aimed at the social and moral welfare of the Coloured people. Therefore it was an organisation which everybody should welcome (Applause).¹⁰¹

Using information doubtless provided by the Guild, he stated that there were between 60 and 70 branches, 'and one of its most cherished ambitions is to raise sufficient money to build a hostel for Coloured girls and women in the city.' Thus the Guild envisaged work that went far beyond support of the men's branches of the APO. The aim of the bazaar was to begin to raise funds for this project. There was no mention of the industrial exhibition for

⁹⁶*Sun*, 6 July 1934.

⁹⁷Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 2 - 3; A Drew, *Discordant comrades. Identities and loyalties on the South African Left*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000, 141.

⁹⁸*APO*, 3 December 1910.

⁹⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰*APO*, 25 March 1911.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*

which the Guild had originally planned to raise funds.¹⁰² Schreiner also pointed to the Guild's educational work among children:

Everybody should show their sympathy by giving it their support. It was already teaching many children in a practical way, under the auspices of Mrs Abdurahman.

The prime object was to get hold of the children, and that was what the women were doing.¹⁰³

It is probable that Nellie Abdurahman tutored her children at home, before they attended Trafalgar.

The stalls were decked out in the Guild's colours, mauve and yellow. Mr and Mrs Schreiner were 'very pleased to see, not only the useful, but the beautiful things exhibited. Bazaars of this kind encouraged the talent of people: to develop a taste for things that are beautiful was one of the truest methods of educating people.... The educational influence of such work was very great.' As usual, the *APO* provided a lengthy report on the speeches of the men, Schreiner and Abdurahman, but summarised Mrs Abdurahman's response in one sentence: 'Mrs Abdurahman thanked Mr and Mrs Schreiner for their kindness, and spoke on the importance of the work of the Guild.'¹⁰⁴

The bazaar did not only generate educational influence, and £40 profit, but a great deal of fun. Among the attractions were the needlework stall, run by Nellie and two young women, Miss Mills and Miss Dollie (probably 'Ru').¹⁰⁵ Rosie was in charge of the sweets stall, while Cissie helped to run the flower stall. (The 'Misses Gool' were on the tea staff). Having been opened at mid-day, the bazaar went on into the night, when the Guild members changed into fancy-dress costumes. The *APO* published a photograph showing Nellie in Japanese, and her daughters in Turkish, dress.¹⁰⁶ As was becoming typical of social functions, Mr Wooding's Western Province Amateur Musical Society band provided the entertainment for the evening. The festivities seemed to underline Schreiner's characterisation of the Guild as apolitical. However, the line between 'social' (in the social welfare sense) and 'political'

¹⁰²The Guild eventually held a sale of members' work, in 1913, which was poorly attended (*APO*, 20 September 1913).

¹⁰³*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵See *APO*, 18 June 1910.

¹⁰⁶*APO*, 25 March 1911. See also M Adhikari, ed. *Straat-praatjies. Language, politics and popular culture in Cape Town, 1909-1922*. Cape Town: buchu books, 1996, 92 - 3.

blurred easily. Increasing moves towards the segregation of education provided the Guild with a platform on which to become politically active. Education was the province of women as well as men, and women's public political action in this arena was praised by the APO.¹⁰⁷

As with the APO, power in the Women's Guild was located in the executive committee in Cape Town. The Guild itself was subject to the approval of the APO executive, which ensured that it played a leading role in directing activities, and reminding women to support the men. However, certain, unnamed, members of the Cape Town branch of the Guild wanted to withdraw from the APO and form an autonomous organisation. The reasons for this are unclear; at this time certain leading men left the APO because of Abdurahman's perceived radicalism.¹⁰⁸ However, the women's proposed change of name was not in any public way linked to these men, and in any case reveals dissatisfaction with the APO. The APO carefully avoided reporting on this matter until it had been resolved. Under the heading, 'Peace Once More', it reported:

The few members of the Cape Town branch of the Guild who have been advocating a complete separation from the APO met with a severe rebuff last Tuesday, when they proposed as a preliminary step to change the name APO Women's Guild to the African Women's guild. They were so severely reprimanded by the other members for their effrontery that they immediately tendered their resignation, which was received with evident satisfaction by the Guild.¹⁰⁹

The report stated triumphantly:

As these rebellious spirits have now been eliminated, the success of the branch will be more marked in future, and with their removal that close relationship which existed formerly between the Guild and the Cape Town branch of the APO, and

¹⁰⁷At the same time, the Zeekoeivlei branch of the Guild established a primary school for Coloured children, as 'no effort has hitherto been made to educate the children in the neighbourhood of Zeekoeivlei. The Guild purchased a supply of books, slates and other requisites, including a blackboard.' The school, which went as far as standard one, was opened in June 1911 (APO, 12 August 1911).

¹⁰⁸Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, 80 - 82.

¹⁰⁹APO, 4 November 1911.

which was somewhat strained of late, will, we feel sure, be re-established to the benefit of all.¹¹⁰

Cissie would have been alert to this revelation that the APO could be challenged, that there were other possibilities for women who wanted to organise politically, but equally that the APO had sufficient power to bring the rebel women back into line. Other branches of the Guild reflected on this rebellious behaviour, and it would have been discussed in the Abdurahman home. Women in certain other branches of the Guild began to voice discontent at their relationship to the APO. For instance, in Scholtz Prospect, three members of the local Guild resigned 'in protest against the men's branch having decided to erect the APO Hall on a site not approved by them.' The women were told that, because they would have the use of the hall, in other words the patronage of the APO, this was a foolish reason to resign. They were told 'They should not allow outside matters to interfere with the internal working of the Guild.'¹¹¹

The APO began to assert more control over the Guild. It stated that 'it was chiefly owing to the attitude of those ladies that we withheld our approval of the Conference called together by the Cape Town branch.'¹¹² The effect of this was to remove any possibility of organising independently as women. The Cape Town Branch of the APO ensured that the Women's Guild was fully involved in participating in joint meetings, which included lectures, debates, cultural entertainment and food. The women tended to be more involved in the latter two items on the agenda. The meetings, which had been held on Thursdays, were rearranged for Tuesday evenings, when the Women's Guild used to hold its own 'social' meetings.¹¹³ As the APO put it:

it was decided that in future the debate meetings would be held on the third Tuesday - the Ladies' night - when the men would, as it were, pay the ladies a visit, and get a

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹*APO*, 2 December 1911. The split within the Cape Town branch had repercussions in other branches of the Guild. Kimberley, for example, resolved not to send delegates to the Conference, which was organised to coincide with the men's conference, at the end of 1911. This branch reacted by putting a notice in the *APO*, saying that it 'would have it understood that they have not the slightest idea of breaking away from the APO, but would adhere to, assist and encourage as far as possible the work carried on by the members of the organisation.' Similarly, a meeting was held at Beaconsfield, and another at Hopefield by the men to ascertain the women's position on 'the status of the Women's Guild in relation to the APO' (ibid.).

¹¹²Ibid.

¹¹³*APO*, 3 February 1912.

cup of tea, and perhaps a cake into the bargain. This, it was thought, would entice the young men to the meetings.¹¹⁴

So the APO and the Guild began to hold joint meetings on Tuesday evenings. These occasions gave Nellie Abdurahman the opportunity to preside with authority over meetings of men as well as women, even if they did limit women's discussions among themselves. The first such meeting was held in March 1912, and was declared a great success.¹¹⁵ From then on, the Cape Town branch only rarely published reports in the 'Women's Column'; more regularly, a report of the joint meeting seemed sufficient to sum up the Guild's activities.¹¹⁶ From time to time, women delivered a lecture.¹¹⁷ Nellie Abdurahman presented a lecture in which she informed her audience of the revolutionary work in primary education of the Montessori School.¹¹⁸ Nellie's lifelong passion for the provision of excellent education to all children would inform her own daughter's lifelong pursuit of education.

The 'tamed' - or 'domesticated' - Women's Guild held its first, and to my knowledge, only, conference at the end of December 1911.¹¹⁹ It coincided with the APO conference in Johannesburg. APO women could not have attended the men's conference, even had they wanted to. The Guild's conference was attended by delegates from only seven branches, including Cape Town. Nellie, as chair, 'said that the object of the gathering was to promote unity among the coloured women of South Africa, and to discuss and promote, if possible, the benevolent, social and intellectual welfare of the womenkind.' She did not mention the APO. The conference drew up a constitution, which they had to forward to the men's conference, underlining their lack of autonomy. Having initially opposed the conference, the men duly discussed the women's constitution and approved it. The details of the constitution were not published in the *APO*, so there is no knowing precisely what it entailed. The Guild

¹¹⁴*APO*, 24 February 1912.

¹¹⁵*APO*, 23 March 1912. See also *APO*, 1 June 1912, when Nellie presided over a meeting where A H Gool gave a lecture.

¹¹⁶See, for instance, *APO*, 24 August 1912.

¹¹⁷Mrs Wooding, for example, articulated a conservative, if not reactionary, view of women. Speaking in August 1912, she argued for a return to the values of 'fifty years ago', and stressed the importance of self-respect, practical education instead of too much intellectual stimulation ('we should make our homes attractive') and good manners. She did, however, urge action: 'Women of today, South Africa's daughters, who have so much to do, rise up then, and let us be up and doing' (*Ibid*).

¹¹⁸*APO*, 21 September 1912, 19 October 1912.

¹¹⁹*APO*, 3 February 1912.

handed responsibility for action to the men by resolving: 'that the Executive body of the APO should be asked to approach the Managers of Schools with a view to securing the appointment of Coloured teachers only in schools for Coloured children'. The conference discussed the Education Scheme; delegates were enthusiastic and 'an excellent scheme was drawn up.' Other issues discussed included Lady Gladstone's Nursing Scheme, which the women agreed to support, and the need to increase 'the benevolent work of the Guild.'¹²⁰

Under the watchful eyes of Dr Abdurahman, the APO attempted to mould the women of its community into domestic goddesses, who would ensure the upliftment of the men and children associated with the organisation. However, in the context of the Union of South Africa and the entrenchment of racial discrimination, this proved impossible. Under the gaze of Cissie and other girl members, women of the APO Women's Guild moved beyond their supportive brief, and by their very existence as an adjunct to a men's political organisation, challenged myths of domesticity. Two issues concerning women in the Guild and beyond it captured the imagination of the APO, and led to a re-examination of women's political duties. As a young girl entering puberty, Cissie would have taken note of both. The first was the women's anti-pass campaign in the Orange Free State, the only province where 'Coloured and Native women and girls were compelled to carry passes'.¹²¹ The second concerned the proposed regulation of domestic workers in 1914. These cases of women's political action are examined in the following chapter, which explores Cissie Abdurahman's adolescent years, from 1911, when she began to take an active part in the cultural activities hosted by joint meetings of the APO and the Women's Guild, and when she began to write, producing the only autographic documents to be preserved from this period of her life. The APO depended on the children of the elite to demonstrate the community's cultural attainments, as people deserving of inclusion in full citizenship within South Africa. Cissie and Rosie would both be called on to play a part in these performances; as the following chapter explores, in their writing the Abdurahman daughters subtly challenged the Stepford world which they were asked to represent.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ For an analysis of the campaign, see Wells, *We now demand!* Chapters 1 and 2.

Chapter Three
'Her Father's Girl'?
Dr Abdurahman's younger daughter
1911 – 1918

'[A]ll afternoon, I was, and felt very unhappy and dismal, tears kept welling up to my eyes, and continually my thoughts kept wandering away and thinking of the evening when our tea-table would be fatherless'¹

In 1911, Cissie Abdurahman turned fourteen years of age. This chapter reflects on her years of transition through puberty. Although no research has been done into notions of 'adolescence' in South African history, in western Europe the notion had been firmly established by this time.² Whether the term 'adolescence' was known is unlikely; it was not part of the discourse of the APO. Childhood itself in District Six had multiple meanings, depending largely on class factors. In a context of widespread poverty, few 'children' would have been able to experience the kind of leisured childhood known to Cissie and Rosie Abdurahman. Puberty, however, was significant for girls, within Muslim families, if not more generally, as menarche drew a line over childhood, even for those whose parents could afford to have them educated in schools.³ Once they reached puberty, such girls were taken out of school, and were prepared for lives of domesticity and marriage. The information we have concerning childhood and puberty is anecdotal and scattered; no research has been published on the meanings of children's lives in District Six at this time. Nevertheless, it is clear that Cissie and her circle of friends were exceptions to the rule. They did not marry young; they were free to travel about unchaperoned; they continued with secondary - and where financially possible, tertiary - education. They were the first generation of modern, middle class 'teenagers', in an age when such a category had not yet been invented.

¹ University of Cape Town Manuscripts and Archives (hereafter UCT M&A): BC1081, Simons collection, Organisations, folder N, letter, 'CZA' to 'Dearest Father'.

² J R Gillis, *Youth and history: Tradition and change in European age relations 1770 – present*. New York: Academic Press, Inc., 1974.

³ In the absence of research into childhood in District Six at the turn of the century, it is impossible to make authoritative statements concerning the community as a whole, or children in Christian or other religious traditions.

For Cissie Abdurahman in particular, life changed in several significant ways, around the age of fourteen or fifteen. Firstly, the issue of secondary schooling became crucial, as home tuition was replaced by education under the eye of Harold Cressy. More broadly, Cissie's education 'in the university of life' included her learning about the militancy of black women in the Orange Free State, who protested against passes, and she was exposed to debates around the proposed registration of black domestic workers. Class and race were brought into stark focus, and this issue provided the women of the APO Women's Guild with an opportunity to voice opinions in public fora on issues other than education. It is difficult to judge how significantly family and other relationships changed in this period, but there are hints that neither Cissie nor Rosie were perfectly happy with their family lives, and that this period of Cissie's life, before she became legally an adult at the age of 21, was more unsettled than her earlier childhood. She seems to have begun to experience some of the effects of hormonal change, as she felt beset by uncontrollable passions, and became self-consciously poetic. She also met and came to know her future husband, Abdul Hamid Gool, who returned to Cape Town from medical studies in England in 1911, and became a close colleague of Dr Abdurahman as the second black doctor in town. By the end of the year, he was practically one of the family, a trusted friend who could work in Dr Abdurahman's study, with only Cissie for company, when her father was away on APO business, and her mother was asleep.

This period contains a relative wealth of material not found for Cissie's earlier childhood. Not only did the *APO* continue to showcase Cissie's cultural and educational achievements, but three precious autographic - and, I suggest, autobiographical - documents exist. One, a letter, alludes to change, and there is therefore some scope to surmise about how relationships changed. The other two are fictional representations, and therefore particularly open to manifold interpretations, and thus difficult to 'pin down'. While the *APO* presented particular distortions of Cissie's childhood - and these continue into this period - Cissie's creative writing distorts, and attempts to conceal, while at the same time alluding to cracks in the edifice of the 'Stepford' families of District Six. This chapter reflects on Cissie's writing, and traces her education, leisure and other activities in the Women's Guild, as refracted through the pages of the *APO* and her letter to her father. Educational achievements, whether scholarly or more broadly 'cultural', were very highly regarded within the District Six community in which Cissie grew up. The *APO* showcased such

achievements, and those who excelled were fêted, irrespective of their age. After all, they reflected the Doctor's ideal community.

As discussed in the previous chapter, any education for black children beyond the fourth standard was highly unusual.⁴ In addition to the constraints of cost and a discriminatory educational system, in many Capetonian Muslim families, the education of girls was considered inappropriate. According to Zobeida Booley, neé Gool, a contemporary and friend of Cissie and Rosie,

When we went to high school - Trafalgar High - oh, it was the talk of the Muslim community. 'That's those girls going to school!' Because then, if you passed Standard One or Standard Two, out you came. Out ... There was not any ostracism, but there was a feeling that we were too educated.⁵

Muslim women's gender role was generally restricted to that of 'mother' and 'housewife':

It was considered strictly the woman's department and the men had to go out and work. And women had to see to all the household and domestic chores.

For Muslim women in particular, it was considered inappropriate for married women - specifically with children - to work outside the home. More generally, in a context in which black men were emasculated as 'boys' by white society, the father's role as breadwinner was felt to be crucial for individual and community self-respect.⁶

Education was seen as a barrier to marriage. Young men tended to feel intimidated by educated young women:

[Interviewer] *Did males feel threatened that you were better educated than them?*

[Zobeida Booley, neé Gool:] Yes, I think they were overawed ... when we walked in a kind of stiffness fell over ... By and large in our community ... girls who became to the age of puberty, they were taken out of school, so that would be Standard Two or Standard Three. They'd be taken out of school. ... definitely when we were introduced to new friends we noticed that constraint because everybody knew [what]

⁴G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall: a history of South African 'Coloured' politics*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987, 160 - 161.

⁵UCT M&A: BC 1004, Western Cape Oral History Project, District Six interviews, Mrs Zobeida Booley, interviewed by A Adhikari, nd.

our standard of education was ... When we were going to Trafalgar High there was talk in our community, naturally. Why are the Gool children still going to school.⁷

And again:

[T]hey couldn't understand, when are we going to get married, and what was all this education ... about? But it never carried any weight with us, what people thought.

The Abdurahman daughters, too, did not fit the stereotype.

Trafalgar school records from this time have not been located, but both Cissie and Rosie attended the school, according to one source for two years.⁸ Amina Gool recalled that the girls were tutored by a young teacher named Harold Cressy, before Trafalgar existed, and other sources suggest that their mother tutored them too. Harold Cressy was appointed principal of Trafalgar School in 1912, the year it received official recognition and this name.⁹ Under Cressy, the school expanded enormously. It is not improbable that Cressy inspired all his students, Cissie Abdurahman included. He shared the Abdurahmans' desire to extend education to all Coloured children, and as the following example demonstrates, supported the education of girls as well as boys.

⁶See, for instance, A Weiss, *The coloured woman in the factory and at home*, M Soc Sci diss., University of Cape Town, 1950.

⁷UCT M&A: BC 1004, Z Booley, interviewed by A Adhikari, nd.

⁸E Everett, *Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool 1897 - 1963: A biography*. BA Hons diss., University of Cape Town, 1978. Dr Abdurahman, Nellie Abdurahman and Dr A H Gool were all intimately involved in the establishment of the Rahmaniyyeh Institute, a Muslim secular school in District Six, in 1913. Nellie was Secretary of the Ladies' Committee; Dr Gool had studied in Cairo and was fluent in Arabic, so he was responsible for this aspect of the curriculum. There is no evidence, however, that either Cissie or Rosie attended this school. See M Ajam, *The raison d'être of the Muslim Mission Primary School in Cape Town and environs from 1860 to 1980 with special reference to the role of Dr A Abdurahman in the modernisation of Islam-oriented schools*. PhD, University of Cape Town, 1986, 209 - 213.

⁹With Dr Abdurahman's assistance, the South African College had been forced to admit him as a student, and he had graduated with a BA in 1910. See *APO*, 11 February 1911. He was then elected as assistant secretary to the APO. A self-taught man, Cressy matriculated by private study in 1907. At this time he was teaching at Clanwilliam, where he also gained the Intermediate BA certificate, which was necessary before one proceeded to the BA degree. In 1909 he was accepted into Rhodes University, but when he arrived, was excluded on the basis of his skin colour. He was similarly rejected by Victoria College (later Stellenbosch University) on the same grounds. He then applied to the South African College in Cape Town, where Dr Abdurahman had been educated. According to the literature, it was at this time that Abdurahman heard of his plight, and took the young man under his wing. Abdurahman used his position in the City Council, and his relationship with his political ally J W Jagger, M P, who was on the SAC Council, 'to pressurize the College into accepting Cressy's application' with 'the threat that the Cape Town City Council would withdraw its £2000 annual grant'. Cressy was admitted into SAC and graduated with a BA at the end of 1910 (M Adhikari, ed, *Against the current: A bibliography of Harold Cressy 1889-1916*. Cape Town: Harold Cressy High School, 1990,7).

On 1 July 1911, Cressy was a member of 'an influential deputation from the Cape Town's men's branch [which] waited upon the members of the local Ladies' [sic] Guild.'¹⁰ The deputation's objective was to:

beg the assistance of the ladies in establishing an education fund, by means of which intelligent Coloured boys and girls might be assisted in obtaining education ... Mr Cressy ... dwelt on the strong need that had been felt for a few such leaders among the women as the men had. He thought that the scheme proposed to support an equal number of boys and girls, [and] by advancing the scheme the Guild would do much towards giving the coloured women of South Africa what they so urgently desired.'¹¹

The Guild later agreed to participate on this committee, and, by fits and starts, it was eventually established, with Mrs Abdurahman a member.¹²

The APO held regular public debates which preceded monthly APO business meetings. A lecture would be followed by some form of cultural entertainment, often recitation of poetry or a song, followed by a debate. The public part of the evening would end with more music, generally, and back-patting speeches. Then the public and the members of the Women's Guild would leave, and the business meeting of the APO commence. One such occasion dovetailed with Cissie Abdurahman's first public appearance, and heralded a key feature of her later life: a close association with Abdul Hamid Gool. This young doctor, recently returned to South Africa from his medical studies in London, agreed to deliver a speech at an APO debating meeting. As reported in the *APO* of 26 August 1911:

Dr Gool, a young coloured doctor, who has recently started practice in Cape Town, gave a most interesting account of his student days in Egypt. He was listened to attentively.

Having studied in Cairo, at that time the centre of Islamic education, Abdul Hamid Gool had then received his medical training in London at Guy's Hospital. He therefore walked a similar tightrope to Dr Abdurahman's, between Muslim and western value systems.¹³ On

¹⁰*APO*, 12 August 1911.

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²In February 1913, Dr Abdurahman said that 'he regretted to see our Education Scheme had not yet come to a finality' (*APO*, 22 February 1913).

¹³In later life, he would be forced to choose between them. His son, Rustum, recalled (Telephonic conversation, 24 March 2002) that Dr Gool was reprimanded for using alcohol in his medicinal tinctures. He was informed that he had to choose between Islam and a medical career. He never attended Mosque again.

Abdul's return to Cape Town, he was welcomed with open arms by Dr Abdurahman, who, while gracious, would never allow himself to be upstaged by the speakers at APO functions (or elsewhere):

Dr Abdurahman moved a vote of thanks to Dr Gool for his address. The Doctor's speech was, as usual, in his own inimitable style. He said he thought that Dr Gool was one of the most brilliant young men who had left South Africa to pursue their studies in England, and that his career as a student at London was such that any one could take pride in. He felt sure that before long Dr Gool would give as good [an] account of himself in South Africa as he had done in England.¹⁴

Dr Gool spoke at the APO meeting on 17 August 1911. Cissie, not yet fourteen, followed suit at the very next gathering, in September, when she recited an original poem. She presented it immediately after listening to a lecture given by Arthur Noon, 'one of the ablest and most eloquent speakers on Socialism.'¹⁵ Noon had earlier written in no uncertain terms about the gender of politics:

Brothers, these unjust attacks on your manhood, from men who are your intellectual inferiors, should not discourage you ... Brothers, the issue lies in your *own* hands. You have been made the tool of ambitious politicians for years. Be men this time.¹⁶

In advertising the evening, the *APO* pronounced:

Miss Cissy [sic] Abdurahman, the daughter of our President, has shown signs of poetic promise, and has been asked to recite one of her compositions, called 'His Mother's Boy'. She has kindly consented to do so.¹⁷

The poem is discussed below, alongside another example of Cissie's creative writing.

The respect with which Cissie was treated was surely significant in the development of her self-confident personality, and, it seems the unleashing of her poetic spirit. The meeting on the evening of Thursday, 21 September, was well attended. Among those present were

¹⁴*APO*, 26 August 1911.

¹⁵*APO*, 9 September 1911.

¹⁶*APO*, 1 January 1910.

¹⁷*APO*, 9 September 1911.

Cissie's mother, her father, and 'Dr Gool', who had clearly been taken into the APO fold.¹⁸ Noon spoke on the topic 'Socialism and the Native Question'. The APO later reported that:

[he] seemed to have the whole subject at his finger tips, spoke eloquently and fluently, carrying the audience entirely with him, and no doubt winning many converts to Socialism. ... Mr Noon's views on the coloured question were such as to delight the mind of the most exacting coloured man.

Dr Abdurahman said that 'he had never heard a speaker who had managed to lay the case for Socialism so clearly in such a short space of time.' He went on to declare himself a socialist.¹⁹ As the report noted, 'Amongst those who helped to make the evening enjoyable was Miss Cissie [sic] Abdurahman, whose original poem ... created quite a little sensation, and showed distinct signs of genius.'²⁰

One cannot but wonder how deeply this evening etched itself on the impressionable mind of the young Cissie, who listened to a clear, accessible, by all accounts (or, rather, by the APO's account) brilliant talk on socialism, so warmly received by her father, after which she received equally warm approval for her own recitation - she had been labelled a genius. The warmth with which Cissie was received speaks to the confidence with which she recited her poem. Like Mr Noon before her, she carried her audience with her. She was the younger daughter of Dr Abdurahman. Her first public oration would, perhaps, remain linked in her mind with a brilliant lecture on socialism, and with her own father's approval. She might have seen Dr Gool in the audience, but he was so much older, the elder brother of her friends. He would also prove to be, briefly, the friend of her elder sister.

1911 ended with a letter, written by Cissie, signing herself 'CZA' to her 'dearest father', who had left Cape Town to attend an APO conference. This letter is the only personal document written by Cissie which exists from the entire period covered by this thesis.²¹ In an outpouring of self-conscious poetry, Cissie conceptualises her feelings towards her father

¹⁸The Coloured political community clearly included 'Indians'. Cf M. Adhikari, 'The product of civilization in its most repellent manifestation': Ambiguities in the racial perceptions of the APO (African Political Organization) 1909-23. *Journal of African History*, 38 (1997), 292; the APO was in effect a racially exclusive organisation, its stated aim being the advancement of the Coloured people. However, the category was clearly fluid.

¹⁹APO, 7 October 1911. Typically, Abdurahman's words were reported in greater detail than those of the speaker.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹UCT M&A: BC 1081, Simons collection, Organisations, folder N.

in terms of romantic love. The history of the document itself is uncertain. It is not located in either of the family archives at the University of Cape Town, but rather in the Simons collection. This collection represents a lifetime's preservation of documents both personal and otherwise, by Ray and Jack Simons. Ray, a Communist, was a personal friend of Cissie, and a political opponent of her father. It is unlikely that Dr Abdurahman would have given the letter to Ray. The fact that this letter from Cissie to her father was found in this particular collection raises the question of whether Dr Abdurahman ever received it, and whether it was even written for his eyes. How the document came to be in the hands of Ray Simons is unknown. It is most likely that Cissie gave the letter to Ray, but she was unable to confirm this; the matter is lost to memory.

There is no clear indication that Dr Abdurahman read this letter. There is however a clue that he may have received it. He had a habit of annotating documents and someone has added the date to this letter. It is clearly in ink of similar age to Cissie's but in a different hand.

Whether Dr Abdurahman ever read this letter is, therefore, a matter of conjecture; it may have been written as a private document. In any case, it cannot be read as an indication of a mutually conceived relationship. It does, however, contain important clues as to Cissie's state of mind and the degree of importance she attached to political issues of the day. It also indicates that Cissie's perception of her father had changed: where previously she had been unmoved by her father's many departures, now she was moved to many pages of heart-felt introspection.

Written extremely neatly and carefully, the letter begins:

You cannot imagine the peculiar feeling which came over me as I stood upon the platform watching the steaming, labouring, engine puff out of the station while the crowd were quietly dispersing, I suddenly realized the fact that your destination would soon be reached, and we would in a few days be separated by a long distance of hundreds of miles. ... I felt very strange when I arrived home, the house seemed

cold and empty and robbed of its richest treasure, I felt absolutely done up and often had to suppress rising passions lest I should vent my sorrow out in a flood of tears.²²

Twice, Cissie refers to her father as the 'treasure' in the Abdurahman home; 'tears kept welling up to my eyes, and continually my thoughts kept wandering away and thinking of the evening when our tea-table would be fatherless.' However, Cissie also refers to this as the first occasion on which she had experienced such feelings. She tries to explain why she had not felt so bereft before:

Years before had you left for England, I would have treated your going with little significance, and perhaps it would not have affected me so as your leaving for Johannesburg has done now. Perhaps I did not realize the significance of losing one who made a home bright and a comfort, or perhaps ... I did not love you as I do now²³

Cissie does not connect her earlier lack of passion to a stronger identification with her mother as a child; she was not in a position to consider the influence of hormonal changes as she developed into a young woman. Cissie struggled to control her 'angry passions':

I feel very downhearted and out of spirits, I seem to give vent to my angry passions now and suffer the consequences terribly. ... I feel my spirits are badly shaken. I feel there are softer and sweeter passions in me which lie asleep, they want to be roused, they have often but have fallen into deep slumber again. Do you know when they were roused? When I composed those few poems. They will surely awake when they hear nature's sweet voice calling them ... ah! When they see the works of nature then they will see the necessity of their existence [sic], that they must overcome my angry passions and retain firm grasp over my soul.²⁴

Cissie did not draw any connection between these passionate feelings and Dr A H Gool, who was in the same room - her father's study - as she wrote. In her letter, she refers to 'Dr Gool', who clearly spent much time in the Abdurahman household, and who, perhaps significantly, had driven Rosie home from the train station in his cart. It is possible that at this stage Rosie, a year older than Cissie, had attracted A H Gool's romantic attention, and

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

that Cissie was unsure how to direct her own emotions. Given Cissie's fertile imagination, it is possible that as a young woman entering puberty herself, she might have projected onto her father feelings she later directed towards Dr Gool.

If Cissie expected this letter to be read by her father, and had wanted to impress him with more than poetic prowess, one wonders why she has nothing 'political' to say. Perhaps she had not been encouraged to be 'political'; she was, after all, a girl. Her writing appears purely self-absorbed - typically 'adolescent'. This suggests that whatever 'political' lessons Cissie may have been learning, they were not consciously ideological, and they were not uppermost in her mind when she thought of her father: or he did not encourage that discourse. She seems to have felt the overwhelming desire to impress him with words of romantic love and poetry, not with passionate devotion to democratic ideals, or any political opinion whatever, or intellectual debate:

I feel like a bird shut up, who cannot sing its sweet song, who cannot see the green mountains which inspire and strengthen its song; its feelings are shattered it has talent of song, but only must be roused, it must be in the fresh pure natural country where the sun and flowers sweeten and enrich its songs.

Mine are poems, what sympathy and care has the world for a poet young or old, none whatever, they may appreciate their works, but the composers receive little credit, so the only comfort poets find is in nature, they are her adorers, worshipers, and servants, they are loved and ruled by her and they are her subjects. I have had many inspirations lately but they are like the sun last but a day.

At this stage of her life, 'CZA' was in love with love, with western European romantic poetry and with her own talents; she does not strike one as a budding political activist, struggling to survive in District Six. This impression is strengthened by a reading of two pieces of creative writing which certainly problematise race, but which provide escapist solutions.

At the end of 1912, the *APO* held an essay and poetry competition for children, divided into age categories. Contestants had to submit their entries under pseudonyms. The quality of the Abdurahman girls' education, and their intelligence, was reflected in the fact that both Rosie and Cissie won in their categories. As the *APO* noted, 'It is significant ... That Miss Z

Abdurahman annexed the two prizes under sixteen for the best story, and the best poem.²⁵ It is striking that although pseudonyms were required, presumably to prevent nepotism, Cissie had already recited her poem to great acclaim at the public meeting described above, in August 1911. It was clear to everyone that the writer of this poem was a daughter of Dr Abdurahman.

Everett is the only writer to have commented on Cissie's contributions to the competition. Of the short story, she writes:

It is a remarkable story to have been written by a fifteen year old. All the threads of her experience are woven into the story - the desire for education, colour prejudice, love for one's family and country. But it was no thinly veiled piece of propaganda. The style is mature, the language and vocabulary complex and the storyline contains much wisdom and understanding.²⁶

Cissie's story, 'Back to the shores of England' and her poem 'His mother's boy', suggest guarded insights into Cissie's perceptions of her family at this stage of her life. Rosie's contribution, a story named 'The Better One', also contains a strongly autobiographical element, and suggests a marked degree of sibling rivalry between the two daughters.²⁷ Significantly, although Rosie was a year older than Cissie, the *APO* had once claimed that Nellie had given birth to twins.²⁸ In Rosie's story, her relationship with Cissie was thinly disguised. She told a tale of a black single mother (perhaps reflecting her own often absent father), who would never be taken for 'white'. She lived with her two children. The younger child in the story is a boy, but the story is told from the point of view of the elder sibling, who 'was about sixteen ... pretty, slight and graceful. Her long hair hung down her back in lovely thick curls. She was reserved and had few friends.' She feels that her brother, 'about fifteen years', was 'unlike his sister in many respects. His companions were not select'. He was terribly spoilt - not as a boy, but as the baby of the family. The elder girl is not loved as much as the younger sibling, who is more boyish - naughty, willful. In fantasy, Rosie describes the demise of her younger sibling. Rosie's pain is clear. The elder Abdurahman

²⁵*APO*, 21 December 1912.

²⁶Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 2.

²⁷Cissie's letter also includes a section where she 'tells on' Rosie for going to the tea room, instead of gazing at Nature (UCT M&A: BC 1081, Simons collection, Organisations, folder N, letter, CZA to Dearest Father).

²⁸*APO*, 12 February 1910.

child, in whom the father was disappointed because she was not male, writes about the younger child as if s/he were indeed a son, but in the story, it is the son/ second child, not the elder, who disappoints. Rosie could never live up to her father's disappointment. Cissie, on the other hand, may have felt less disappointing, and strove to take the place of that unborn boy. This, at least, is suggested in Cissie's writing.

In a vignette which may well have been repeated through Rosie's life in respect of her more beautiful, more vivacious sister, the judges commented that Cissie's short story would have won in the older age-category too. Cissie's story was better than Rosie's, and the younger sister should have beaten the older out of a prize.²⁹ Like the letter discussed above from Cissie to her father, these two self-conscious examples of 'creative writing' are replete with similes and overflowing with adjectives. The letter, poem and short story are all written in a romantic style (including the idealisation of Nature), all three evoking idealised families, ruled by benign patriarchs with willing, adoring children. The poem implies this idealisation in its representation of a claustrophobic, even deadly, mother-child family in which the father is absent. In attempting to come to terms with the frustrations of living out a stifling stereotype, perhaps, Cissie turned to the most accessible tropes which, in her personal experience, served to suppress action and deny opportunities for full, truthful living: race and gender.³⁰ The poem will be examined first as the earliest piece, followed by the story, with a focus on the degree of politicisation evident in the young Cissie, and her representation of family relationships.³¹

In her creative writing, Cissie transposes her own gendered identity, which in her father's view restricted her to specific feminine roles, to that of a boy, who was freer to act. Both the poem and short story demonstrate this transposition, and so does Rosie's story: in both stories, there are two children, and the elder is a girl and the younger a boy. Rosie clearly identifies with the feminine role and criticises the boyishness of the younger sibling; Cissie identifies with the masculine, the son for whom her father wished.

²⁹ *APO*, 21 December 1912. The stories and poem discussed below were reproduced in this edition.

³⁰ Class was not an issue for her because she was privileged in class terms.

³¹ It is worth noting that by the time that Ray Alexander was 14, she was a member of the Communist underground in Riga, Latvia, and that she was invited to become the secretary of the Communist Party soon after her arrival in South Africa, a year or so later. She was a fully fledged Communist at the age of twelve; it is not unfair to ask whether Cissie Abdurahman's political ideas were formed by this age. For Ray Alexander, see her unpublished autobiography, in the author's possession.

Cissie's poem, 'Her Mother's Boy', written when Cissie was about thirteen, is less complex than her story and letter, and does not directly examine the father-daughter relationship. As the title suggests, its subject is the mother-child dynamic. Unlike Rosie's sympathetic portrayal of a mother in the absence of a father, Cissie's poem reveals resentment. This is also apparent in her short story, discussed below, in which she kills off the mother - who, while loving, is too great a focus of the father's loving attention - and creates a single parent family with the father and two children.

Cissie disguises herself as a boy, always with bright, intelligent eyes: in 'Her Mother's Boy', s/he is not only male, but pale.

His eyes were bright, his hair was fair,
He was his mother's boy ...
Around his neck in flaxen folds
His golden ringlets fell;
His cheek was like the crimson rose,
His eyes like the blue-bell.

In both the poem and the story, the protagonist, here suggesting Cissie, there her father, has blue eyes, the unattainable sign of 'whiteness'. At the beginning of puberty (a stage that she was clearly going through by the end of the year in which she wrote the poem), Cissie was focusing on issues of 'race'. She does not, however, hold her father responsible for her positioning as not-blue-eyed, not-flaxen-haired and crimson-cheeked. In the poem, and in the short story, the problem is the mother.

In the poem, the mother and child live alone on 'the lonely moor', a term which would not be used of the South African landscape (in the short story she uses the term 'veldt' to evoke such a place). A sense of isolation and claustrophobia is evoked by the incestuous relationship:

'Both were proud, and spoke to none;
Yet both were very poor.
When children sought his company
On any summer's day

She'd proudly check the little mites,
And lead him then away.
None saw the boy, he, too, was proud.
He was his mother's boy.
None but her proud and selfish self
His presence could enjoy.

The child is not held responsible for his mother's 'selfish' domination. In the short story, discussed below, a similar familial situation is evoked where the children are caged by one parent - but in that case, the impulse is love, and the desire to protect the children from racism, on the part of the father: there is no criticism of him. In this case, it is the selfishness of the mother ('selfish' is reiterated) that is responsible for the child's isolation.

In the poem, the child inexplicably falls ill, linked to the mother's selfishness (but not explained). The boy's illness brings the mother to her senses:

She promised to give her boy to the world
If ever he recovered;
but he dies, despite her 'deep maternal care' - the only moment in the poem where Cissie is sympathetic to the mother. The death of the child leaves the mother 'alone':

She bowed her head before the Lord
And yielded up her child.
Gone was her haughty, selfish spirit,
She was humbled, meek and mild.

Everett commented that the poem 'concerned love, death and pride and was strongly moralistic, reflecting, like the story, Cissie's concern with these topics.'³² She does not comment on the implied criticism of the mother's overbearing, controlling attitude towards her child. Cissie's displacement of herself onto a blond, blue-eyed boy, the only child in a single-parent family, permits her to express intense feelings of frustration in the mother-child relationship, which at this stage of her life could have pointed to a desire to protect the daughter from other 'children', perhaps boys, who wanted to 'play' with her. The poem begs comparison with the short story, which similarly forefronts issues of race, but in a more

complex way. In the story Cissie uses both race and gender as devices behind which she can hide. In both cases, Cissie is clearly identified with the boy in the family.

Cissie's story is entitled 'Back to the shores of England'. It deals in stereotypes which are set against each other: 'typical' liberal English against 'typical' racist Dutchman/ Afrikaner ('what could he do when he had to deal with such heartless, ignorant people, smothered in their own prejudice'), city (Johannesburg) against rural village (somewhere in Tembuland). It also evokes a family that is different, and yet, familiar, to Cissie's own, and which allows her to work through the her experiences of racist discrimination. Her story provides a solution which would have embarrassed her as a radical anti-imperialist political activist decades later.

'Back to the shores of England' tells the story of a 35-year old man, from whose 'handsome face and well-cut prominent features, his thick brown curly hair, and bright blue eyes', 'it was quite evident' that 'he was a typical, true and thorough Englishman.' His name is Eric Raven, and he turns out to be a dispossessed English aristocrat named The Honourable Eric Avondale, whose father forgives him and accepts him and his family in the last few paragraphs of the story. Cissie, as a member of the black elite, might have liked to be a recognised aristocrat. Eric is married to Bess, who 'was a half-Native girl, her father a Native and her mother an English woman. She had now reached her twenty-ninth year.' Cissie therefore displaces her own family sufficiently to be able to manipulate it to suit her creative purposes, and to find a solution unavailable to them.

Cissie's examination of racism does not prevent her from unself-consciously using the term 'girl' to describe an adult woman, and 'Kaffir', which was considered more derogatory than 'Native'.³³ Nevertheless, the protagonists in the story are all 'beautiful', irrespective of the colour of their skin; Cissie provides an early example of a recognition and celebration of beauty in black women, who, nevertheless, are stereotypically flawless. Therefore, Bess:

was dark-complexioned, and her beautiful pure milk-white teeth, contrasted splendidly with her dark, smooth, spotless, velvety skin. Her dark, black, glittering

³²Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 3.

³³'Native' which would form part of the name of the South African Native National Congress, formed in 1912, and later renamed the African National Congress. Within the APO community itself, the word 'native' was routinely used, but 'kaffir' was not.

eyes were shaded by long black curved lashes. Her hair was short, thick and curly, and clung in thick masses round her neck and beautiful forehead.

However, this is no 'typical' African beauty: '

The clear, prominent features of the Englishwoman, which she inherited from her mother, could be detected in her well-shaped mouth and nose. Eric called her his dark beauty. Her nature, like her beauty, was dark, grave and silent, yet beautiful in its kind.

Other than the curly hair, Cissie could have been describing herself; her beauty was renowned, but her hair was straight. She looked, perhaps, more like Eric and Bess's children, Enid and Edwin. 'They had their mother's smooth, dark skin, but the well-formed features of their father: his tall, graceful figure, and the thick, straight hair.' The children were ten and nine years of age respectively, just a little younger than Cissie and Rosie. The point of the story is that, despite Bess's beauty, because she was dark, she would suffer humiliation at the hands of a 'typical Dutchman', and as a result, would die.

The family was *en route* to Johannesburg where the husband would find work, and the children would receive a good, western, education. Eric, like Dr Abdurahman, is obsessed with the desire to educate his children. Bess, like Nellie, is similarly determined. She has to sacrifice her home for the city, in order to have the children educated, but she does so willingly, if sadly. The father, however, is the family's educator, both in 'the three Rs' and in religion and morality. Bess's mother had died while she was an infant (her father is not mentioned), and Eric had taught her to:

read and write, and even in her spare hours to draw and paint. He explained the difference between right and wrong; told and taught her of God, and to love, obey, and worship Him in the silence of her heart. He told her of the viciousness and evil of cant and hypocrisy, and did all in his power that she might make her religion not only a theory, but a practice.

There is no hint of criticism about the paternalistic, imperialistic impulse informing Eric's education, and no awareness that Bess might actually know the difference between right and wrong, not to mention have a religion of her own. Later in the story, after Bess's death in a hovel on the farm of the 'typical long-bearded Dutchman', (who 'exclaimed: "Ala Machtig!

O, God, ik wil ne zo 'n swart kaffer mens in mijn huis hê ne.”)³⁴ for whom, importantly, Eric ‘feels sorry’, Eric cannot bear to be parted from his children for a moment, and takes on the responsibility of educating them too.

In this story, the parents play specific gender roles:

The children were dearly loved by their parents. The mother cherished for them an undying love, and guarded them day and night with deep maternal care. The father, from the time when they were able to speak properly, had commenced teaching them himself. Had taught them to read, to write, and to speak fluently, and had even troubled their still young minds with those dry elements, arithmetic and geography. Cissie’s autobiographical voice is loudest here, where she refers to ‘those’ subjects; we know that she struggled with mathematics and accounts later in life, and if so, she probably did so as a child. Maths would plague Cissie to the end.³⁵ In the absence of any clear historical evidence, it is tempting to wonder if this education refers to her own, at her own father’s hands. It would certainly have been in character, and Cissie’s life-long association of her father with his book-lined study supports this possibility.

Cissie’s story does not examine the relationships between the siblings, Enid and Edwin. She does, however, describe the older sibling as having ‘large brown eyes, which spoke sweetness and gentleness’, whereas the younger sibling, the boy, had ‘his mother’s black, glittering eyes, which shone with enthusiasm and determination.’ There is no sibling rivalry, unlike in Rosie’s story, but gender roles are clear, and stereotypical. The boy and man are active; the girl and woman are beautiful, sweet, silent, and passive. But the mother must go; while blameless, she is the focus of the father’s attention. The solution is to let her die, in a heart-wrenching way, which then leaves the children the sole love objects of the father.

Cissie’s description of Eric’s response to Afrikaner racism reflects the politics of the APO, and as this was written for the APO’s publication, may point to opportunistic writing rather than to Cissie’s own attitude. Indeed, the structure of the narrative indicates that while she would not at this stage criticise her father/ Eric, she does not see tolerance as a solution. When faced with the stark racism of the Dutchman, who will not allow the dying Bess into

³⁴ Translation: ‘Almighty! Oh God, I do not want such a black kaffir person in my house’.

³⁵ See Chapter Six.

his house, but directs a 'small Kaffir boy' (Cissie's words, not the Dutchman's) to take her to a 'hokje' or 'out-house', Eric's response is to be:

cruelly stung by the words of the farmer. Still, what could he do when he had to deal with such heartless, ignorant people, smothered in their own prejudice. And since his case demanded immediate attention, he followed the boy with his dying wife.

This story was written in the aftermath of Union, of Cissie's father's vain attempt to keep racism out of the legislation governing Union. The key question facing the APO and Dr Abdurahman, which Cissie raises with her story, is 'what could he do'? The father in the story is treated sympathetically in his tolerance and in the way in which he parted from the Dutchman after Bess's death:

Raven, having inspanned his oxen, thanked the farmer, though he could not bear to look upon him who valued his well-furnished rooms higher than human life. But Raven stood one moment to breathe a prayer, and to drop a tear for this poor, ignorant man.

What was to be done? The family, *sans* mother, continues on its journey to Johannesburg, where the father practically encages the children for his fear of losing them. He 'spent every spare moment in the loved company of his children.' Like Dr Abdurahman, Eric Raven 'was a total abstainer, and frequented no clubs.' Again, acting from impulses not out of character for Cissie's father, Raven 'would not suffer his children to go near the city, lest their pure hearts should become contaminated with the sin and vice of the coarse, vulgar crowd.' However, whereas Dr Abdurahman's political and medical duties rendered him something of an absent father, Eric 'continued to teach them, and guarded them closely and jealously, lest they should at any time be snatched away, and this leave him friendless and alone.'

Cissie could write from experience of Eric's lesson regarding 'the bitter feelings and prejudice of the people against his children', as a result of which 'he clung and looked more and more to his children for comfort, happiness and love.' The claustrophobic incestual underpinnings of this image are unrelieved by a description of how the children coped with such paternal pressure. There is no hint of rebellion on the part of the children, only loving support. Edwin, with whom Cissie may have identified herself as the younger sibling, is described as 'the smarter of the two', and easily expresses his love for his father, 'flinging

his arms around him' when Eric tells the tale of his aristocratic origins and his father's rejection of him for his youthful over-indulgence.

What *was* to be done? Politically, the best solution that Cissie could envisage was to escape to England. One imagines that this kind of conversation must have occurred numerous times in the Abdurahman household; it is clear that Nellie insisted on the children's education in South Africa. This may have been resented by the young Cissie, who transposed her frustrations onto a boy (more closely identified with her father, and freer to act), who, having disposed (however sadly) of the (restrictive?) Mother, was now free to study in England:

'Oh, father!' cried the happy boy, 'now I shall be able to learn all I desire. Enid can have painting lessons, and I can go to college'

Enid, the girl in the story, did not need to go to college. Edwin, reflecting Cissie's own boyish ambitions, now could.

There is no hint in this story of an awareness of British imperialism and colonialism; England represents freedom, the dissolution of racist oppression, the ability to 'sail away from that city of cruel, bitter prejudice to the Land of Freedom.' The story therefore neatly reflects the APO, and Dr Adurahman's position. Whether Cissie's willingness to take the same position was in order to win a prize, or as a representation of her own political position, is unknown. However, the story clearly exalts the position of the Father within the family, and would provide fertile ground for psychoanalytic explication. The identification of Cissie with a son, both in her own writing and in Rosie's, is significant, and may help to explain not only her self-confidence as a young girl in a patriarchal society, but also her later entry into, and appropriation of a place in the public world of politics, dominated by men.³⁶

³⁶The positioning of daughters as surrogate sons in families without boys, has been discussed in feminist literature which focuses on daughter-father relationships. See Katherine Hill-Miller's essay on the relationship between Anne Thackeray and her father, William Thackeray (K C Hill-Miller, 'The skies and trees of the past': Anne Thackeray Ritchie and William Makepeace Thackeray, in L E Boose and B S Flowers, eds. *Daughters and fathers*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, 361-383). There are similarities between Katherine's perception of her relationship with William, and Cissie's writing of/ to her father. 'When Anne Thackeray was a small child, she was convinced her father was Jesus Christ' (ibid).

In the Abdurahman family, according to Katherine Hill-Miller's model, Rosie as first born should have been the one to take the place of a son.³⁷ Cissie's position as younger child renders the father-daughter relationship more complex. Rosie's story indicated a strong sense of sibling rivalry, of the younger child being 'spoilt', and undeserving of his/her position in the centre of the family. In some ways, Cissie behaved as an elder child: she may have fought to 'unseat' her elder sister as functionally the first-born. Frank Sulloway's *Born to rebel* offers insights into the significance of birth order within families.³⁸ He argues that, depending on (functional) birth order, children develop specific niches in the family economy, in order to appropriate as much of their parents' attention as possible.³⁹ Later born children tend to rebel against the social order. While Cissie Gool fits this profile, there is insufficient information to ascertain whether her birth order was indeed a significant factor.

Cissie's political awareness contrasted with the militancy of women in the Orange Free State who were protesting against the imposition of pass laws at this time. As a member of the APO's Women Guild, Cissie would be exposed to new forms of women's protests which challenged stereotypes concerning women's gender roles in the political arena.⁴⁰ In April 1912, an all-male deputation of the African National Congress had 'brought to the attention of the Minister [Burton] the special grievances of the women in the [Orange Free State].' The minister agreed to look into the matter, but 'the women, apparently, were either dissatisfied with the Minister's assurance or, having decided to come to Town, would not wait until Mr Burton had time to act.' This did not receive the approval of the APO. It argued that the women should have waited for the ANC conference to discuss their grievances - they should not take matters into their own hands. On the other hand, the Women's Guild in Cape Town was put out that

the Coloured women of the Orange Free State did not consult the Executive of the APO Women's Guild. We feel sure that no deputation of Coloured men of the APO would come to Cape Town without first acquainting the Executive with the object of its mission.⁴¹

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸F J Sulloway, *Born to rebel. Birth order, family dynamics, and creative lives*. London: Abacus, 1996.

³⁹Ibid. Sulloway's discussion of the importance of gender is the weakest aspect of his book: girls are provided with a single chapter (under the rubric of gender), while the vast majority of his examples are male.

⁴⁰J Wells, *We now demand! The history of women's resistance to pass laws in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993, Chapter 1.

⁴¹APO, 6 April 1912.

Then, in June 1913, the *APO* reported that 'Coloured and Native women' in the Orange Free State, who were required to carry passes, had resolved to engage in passive resistance. This time the *APO* responded by congratulating the women. 'Our only advice to them is when in prison don't do a stitch of work of any sort.'⁴² The following edition of the *APO* took up the theme. The organisation was forced to redefine the women's actions: 'the town [Bloemfontein] was thrown into a state of great excitement over the women, not passively resisting the law, but openly defying it in a hostile demonstration.' Women had arranged a petition, and when some were arrested, a crowd of women marched to the police station without passes, and gave themselves up to be arrested. They were duly arrested. The *APO* was deeply moved by the protest of these women, and jolted into seeing women from a new perspective:

Friday morning, the 6th June, should and will never be forgotten in South Africa. On that day the Native women declared their womanhood ... The Union Parliament has laughed for four years at our misery, mocked our tears, but in our darkest moment the women, the Black women, have spoken; and, whether the present battle be lost or won, our future is now more hopeful.⁴³

Certainly, Nellie had been able to run the Abdurahman home and look after herself and her children for years, but the impact of the anti-pass protests on the rhetoric of the *APO*, and women single-mindedly pursuing their freedom, would have registered in Cissie's mind.⁴⁴

In the meantime, Walter Wooding continued to educate his pupils in the skills of the pianoforte, and gave piano recitals, featuring their achievements. The first was held in February, 1913:

The Recital was opened with the overture "Ruy Blas" (Mendelssohn) on two pianos, Misses Lotter and Cissie Abdurahman playing the first piano and Misses Rosie Abdurahman and Arendse the second piano ... The pupils played with much confidence and grace ... the manner in which the difficult passages were executed, showed the thoroughness of their training.

⁴²*APO*, 14 June 1913.

⁴³*Ibid.* See also 'The Office Boy's Reflection' in this issue.

⁴⁴The *APO* appealed for donations to help support the families of the women in prison, and there was a positive response from readers (See, for example, *APO*, 23 August 1913).

The solo instrumentalists were Misses Rosie Abdurahman, Marie Lotter, Violet Arendse, Cissie Abdurahman, and Master Henry Wooding, each of whom played with excellent taste and expression, but to Rosie Abdurahman must be given the honour of having rendered her solo with that brilliancy of touch and expression of feeling which only belong to a true artiste.⁴⁵

The Abdurahman girls' hard work at learning difficult pieces was apparent, as was their talent in performing them. At this stage of their lives, Rosie's achievements overshadowed Cissie's. Her educational accomplishments would be praised in the pages of the *APO*, as a Muslim girl who had overcome great obstacles.

1913 opened with many educational accolades in the pages of the *APO*, in addition to the general praise heaped on Dr Abdurahman for the showpiece of the Essay competition. He had sent copies of the *APO* Christmas number to every influential person he could think of, and almost all wrote glowing praise for the standard of the essays and poems, including Olive Schreiner.⁴⁶ In addition, the *APO* congratulated three pupil-teachers working at Trafalgar, who had passed their examinations. Harold Cressy himself had also passed higher educational examinations, and in addition, three young Muslim women, all related to Abdurahman, were singled out for their achievements.

The year 1913 will probably never be forgotten by the Moslems of the Cape, because of the distinction gained by three Moslem girls. Miss Rukea Dollie, a cousin to Dr Abdurahman, is the first Moslem girl to gain the Cape T3 Certificate... Miss Hawa Effendi, a niece of the Doctor, has just passed the London Matric in French, Latin, Mathematics and History... The third Moslem girl to distinguish herself is Miss Waradea, daughter of our President. She obtained the Cape Junior Certificate.⁴⁷

The fact that all three young women were in some way related to Dr Abdurahman is significant. 'Ru' and 'Ro' (Rukea and Rosie) were good friends, and pushed each other to excel; as the elder child, Rosie may have felt more pressure in this regard than did Cissie.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *APO*, 8 March 1913.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *APO*, 25 January 1913. Earlier, she was referred to as 'Ruthea'. See *APO*, 18 June 1910.

⁴⁸ Apparently, Rukea Dollie later married Dr Abdurahman's brother Ismail (Letter, A Adams to the *Cape Times*, 14 August 1993).

Indeed, among black Capetonians, Muslim girls seem to have been better educated, thanks partly to Abdurahman's influence, than were Christians.⁴⁹

Then Rosie was fêted for her educational achievement:

The Trafalgar Second Class Public School has achieved a unique distinction by passing the first Coloured girl through the University Junior Certificate Examination (the old School Higher). Miss Rosie Waradea Abdurahman ... has been successful in passing the Junior Certificate Examination of the Cape University. Miss Abdurahman's success will be greeted with satisfaction by the coloured population, for she has gained the distinction of being the first coloured girl from a coloured school to pass this examination and because she triumphed in spite of the many insults she and her parents have had to face in their attempts to place her into a properly equipped secondary school... Miss Abdurahman, with her sister Cissie, who figured so prominently in the Essay Competition, has already set an example to the rest of the coloured girls of South Africa by doing what so few coloured girls do, namely by passing the seventh standard, which she and her sister did at the Annual Inspection of the School twelve months ago ... We trust that Miss Abdurahman will continue her educational successes, and maintain the family name, and add honour to her people.⁵⁰

This confirms that Cissie and Rosie were at the school in 1911 - 1912. No reason is given as to whether Cissie wrote and failed, or did not write, the Junior Certificate examination alongside Rosie.

The *APO* went on to lament:

[A] Coloured child that has passed the seventh standard has no opportunities for further progress, unless his parents are prepared to spend four or five times the sum they would otherwise spend, on home tuition, and private tutors.⁵¹

Harold Cressy placed an advertisement in the *APO*: 'A speciality of the School is the University Junior Certificate Class and a Matriculation Class will be formed if pupils present themselves.'⁵² It would appear, then, that Cressy was willing to teach matric to those

⁴⁹ *Ajam*, *Raison d'être*, 209 - 213.

⁵⁰ *APO*, 25 January 1913.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *APO*, 13 January 1912.

students who wanted it. Because as a secondary school Trafalgar was not permitted to take students to matric, the only way this could be done was privately.

As important a factor as Cissie's parents' devotion to education, was the quality of the education she received. Cissie's choice to devote much of her adult life to study points to an early education that affirmed the very experience of education. In the negative context in which Cissie faced primary and secondary education, the devotion of both her parents to education does not explain sufficiently Cissie's love for study. Harold Cressy may help to do so. The evidence may be circumstantial, but it points to the conclusion that, firstly, he provided a level of education which pleased Abdurahman, who chose to have his daughters educated under his care. This was despite Cressy having run a profoundly under-resourced school, with fees that were higher than 'White' schools.⁵³ As the *APO* noted in 1913,

With all credit to Mr Cressy's efforts in that direction, there is not a single efficiently equipped school in the Western Province where a Coloured boy or girl may prepare for any of the University examinations on anything approaching the same chances as European boys and girls. The equipment of the Trafalgar Public School is unsatisfactory, and its building is a disgrace to the School Board.⁵⁴

In providing an education of the highest possible standard in this context, however, it is possible that Cressy played a role in instilling in Cissie a love for education.

He was universally remembered as a warm-hearted, modest, good-natured man; a highly intelligent, self-educated man with a deep regard for Dr Abdurahman and for education. I would suggest that one reason that Cissie had such a love for education that she studied until the end of her life, was because her experience of education had been at the hands of the gentle, excellent Cressy.

In 1914, an issue sparked off great anger among the *APO* community, which also provided an opportunity for discussion of the role of women in politics, and underlined the political significance of race rather than class. For Cissie, it would show that her mother could participate on equal terms with her father in whatever strategy was felt to be appropriate. The Administrator of the Cape Province proposed an amendment to the Municipal

⁵³*APO*, 22 February 1913.

⁵⁴*APO*, 25 January 1913.

Ordinance for the 'compulsory registration and medical examination of domestic servants'. The APO protested that 'as the domestic servants were practically all coloured, it behoved the Organisation to register its strong protest against the drastic and demoralising proposal of the Administrator.'⁵⁵ Members of the Women's Guild were present at the meeting, and 'Mesdames Abdurahman and Wooding *inter alia* voiced their indignation against the proposal.' This was despite the fact that their own daughters would never be in this position; Other women cleaned their houses and helped to care for their children. The meeting resolved to hold a mass meeting at the Bethel Institute, to inform the general public, and resolved:

That this meeting of the Cape Town Branch of the APO and of the APO Women's Guild most indignantly protests against the proposed compulsory ... registration and medical examination of domestic servants and children's nurses, owing to the proposal being most degrading and demoralising.⁵⁶

It was also decided to send a deputation to the Administrator. Both Dr and Mrs Abdurahman were on the deputation. This was the first time that Nellie entered the public political arena in this manner, and again Cissie would have paid attention.

The mass meeting included 'a fairly large proportion of women.' As the main speaker, Dr Abdurahman promised that should the proposal go through, he would do everything in his power - including travelling around the country - to ensure that no women registered as domestic workers. Ruth Alexander underlined the insulting nature of the proposal: 'The logical result of the proposed legislation would be that no decent woman would allow her daughter to go into domestic service.' N R Veldsman, no longer a member of the APO, made the point that 'it was a matter which so peculiarly affected the women that he thought they should have a woman in the chair [Mr Gales, who knew a lot about motor cars, presided], and nothing but women speakers.' He then contradicted his own suggestion, by adding that he had four daughters in domestic service 'and he would never allow any of them to undergo what was proposed.'⁵⁷ Nevertheless, women were being challenged to enter public politics. Mrs Wooding, secretary of the Guild, felt 'insulted and degraded ... it was the duty of every woman in Cape Town to protest.' Nellie Abdurahman said 'that she

⁵⁵ APO, 2 May 1914.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

felt so strongly on that matter that she could hardly express her thoughts. She would rather do the domestic work herself than have servants under the proposed conditions. She instanced what the Native women of the Orange Free State had done to protest against the Pass Laws, and said that the women of the Cape Province should do the same.⁵⁸

In the event, the Administrator fumbled his way out of the situation and withdrew the proposal, and the women of District Six did not take to the streets. Instead, the revolutionary potential of the women was put in its place by Mrs Cressy, who gave a lecture on 'Domestic training and Service', in which she argued that domestic servants made the best house-keepers, wives and mothers, and that 'those, after all, were the chief functions of women.'⁵⁹ This is not the lesson which Cissie would take from such political potential.

World War I marked a hiatus in the history of the Abdurahman family's political activities. As Adhikari notes, after a period of decline,

The outbreak of World War I provided the APO leadership with a face-saving justification for its lack of political activity. The war was seen as an opportunity for coloureds to demonstrate their loyalty to the state and their value as citizens, particularly in the light of widespread opposition to the War amongst Afrikaners. The APO thus suspended its protest activity and lent its full support to the Allied cause.⁶⁰

The *APO* ceased publication from November 1915, noting that this was not the fault of the government, but of the coloured people themselves, who had failed to support the paper financially. The organisation remained dormant for most of the war.⁶¹

Tragically, Harold Cressy fell ill in March 1916, and left Cape Town to recuperate in Kimberley. He died there in August of the same year. As members of a tiny educated elite,⁶² Rosie and Cissie both matriculated privately that year (Rosie from Palmer's University

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹*APO*, 13 June 1914.

⁶⁰M Adhikari, ed. *Straat-praatjies. Language, politics and popular culture in Cape Town, 1909-1922*. Pretoria: J L van Schaik, 1996, 12.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Horrell notes that 'of those attending school in 1919, only 68 were in secondary classes' (M Horrell, *The education of the coloured community in South Africa, 1652 - 1970*. Johannesburg: South African Institute for Race Relations, 1970, 38). See also *APO*, 1 August 1919: 'More than half the non-European [sic] pupils are in

Classes, Cissie with a certificate from London University). The following year Cissie achieved the Intermediate BA, which allowed her to register in 1918 at the University of Cape Town. Mohamed Ajam suggests that Cissie and Rosie 'obtain[ed] an education equal to that of their peers in Europe and consonant with their social status.'⁶³ But, as will become clear in the following chapter, the extent to which Cissie would struggle at university suggests that, despite their social status, and despite the assistance rendered by their parents and by Cressy, black education was under-resourced and its quality was well below that acquired by 'White' girls of similar social standing. Cissie Abdurahman would achieve her tertiary education through determination and strength of will, rather than through any advantage her secondary education might have provided. Nevertheless, Cissie and Rosie demonstrated the courage and determination to succeed against these odds, when they became the first black women to register at the University of Cape Town.

Cissie had learnt much from the Women's Guild about political organisation and leadership, from watching her mother. But while becoming accomplished in the arts of needlework and the pianoforte, she did not take on board all the values of the Guild. She certainly gained a grounding in respectability and 'high culture', but she did not, for example, become the kind of model woman espoused time and again by the Guild and the APO. However, the Guild also demonstrated that women were capable of achieving a great deal more than the pleasure or 'civilisation' of their husbands. This suited Cissie's personality, because she would never be content to stay at home and mother children and be a 'good wife'. As an adult, she would not uphold the values, for example, of the women of the Zeekoeivlei branch of the Guild, who were 'instrumental in bringing about the marriages of several people who have been living together for a considerable time as man and wife.'⁶⁴ She had other ambitions, and these had received a grounding in her membership of the Guild, and in the immense support - flattery, even - that she received as a beautiful, accomplished member of the Abdurahman family. The respect with which the APO treated those who fulfilled its objectives of educational and cultural excellence boosted her self-confidence, as her mother's example as president of the Guild pointed to the possibilities of women's engagement with the political arena so dominated by men. As a child, learning the art and the rewards of public speaking

the sub-standard; secondary education is practically non-existent ... practically all the non-European pupils leave school at some stage below Standard VI.'

⁶³ Ajam, *Raison d'être*, 232.

⁶⁴ APO, 14 January 1911.

in front of admiring audiences, Cissie was appreciated and respected. She was declared a genius. As an adult, she would demand nothing less.

Chapter Four
Between two worlds
1918 - 1927

[A life emerges and] enters into the flow of this time, wafted this way and that, driven by it, sometimes altering its direction, matching as best it can its inner being to the demands of the time outside it. Both dimensions are real, inner and outer, and together they form the matrix that makes the path and trajectory real.¹

Locating a moment of transition from childhood to adulthood is, in certain respects, arbitrary. One such moment for Cissie Abdurahman might be her shift from the safe confines of secondary education under the APO umbrella, to the demands of studying at the more strictly segregationist University of Cape Town. Here for the first time, Cissie had to negotiate a difficult environment without all-encompassing familial and community support. At the University of Cape Town, where Coloured male workers were routinely referred to at the highest levels as 'boys',² Cissie and Rosie were merely 'non-European' students. On the other hand, the wrench was less traumatic than it might have been, because they registered at the University together - Cissie did not face it alone - and they continued to live at Albert Lodge.³ The continuity provided by living at Albert Lodge for the first year of her studies was significant in providing the necessary support for the young Cissie.

An alternative transitional moment may be located in a life-course shift of a different kind, when Cissie left her parental home and moved to 48 Searle Street. In 1919, she married long-time family friend, Abdul Hamid Gool. However, marriage was not the end of the fairy tale of Cissie's life. Rather, by permitting a break from the influence of her parents, in the context of continued study at the University of Cape Town, it allowed her to develop

¹S Clingman, *Bram Fischer: Afrikaner revolutionary*. Cape Town: David Philip and Mayibuye Books, University of the Western Cape: 1998, 1.

²University of Cape Town (hereafter UCT) Archives, General Purposes Committee Minutes, 5 July 1918.

³Cissie never had to share accommodation in a university residence, where her experience of racist alienation might have been more stark. For the institution, and shortage, of women's residences at UCT, see E Walker, *The South African College and the University of Cape Town 1829-1929*. Cape Town: Cape Times Ltd, 1929, 72, 85, 100, and H Phillips, *The University of Cape Town 1918-1948: The formative years*. Cape Town: UCT in association with the UCT Press, 1993, 120, 123. Residences were racially exclusive and even by the forties

intellectual distance, the freedom to disappoint her father, and to relate to her mother as an equal: in short, to grow up. Cissie was able to balance and accommodate the seemingly competing personae of socialite and member of the Coloured elite - married to one pillar of the District Six community and daughter of another - and a black woman student at a White-dominated university.

Through the 1920s, Cissie shared in some of the political activities of her father, mother and husband, all of whom were concerned, *inter alia*, with 'Indian' politics. Despite the recognition of women's militancy in the earlier period, men continued to dominate APO politics, and neither Nellie nor Cissie challenged this dominance in this period. Cissie did, nevertheless, engage with political issues, either through hosting various foreign dignitaries in her home, or through typical APO Women's Guild-type activities: organising social events. I have been unable to link Cissie to any of the specifically 'Coloured' political campaigns in this period, although this may well be more a function of the sources than any reflection on her own political perspective.⁴ On the other hand, Cissie's marriage to a man classified Indian foregrounded Indian issues for her, and she played a supportive role in this aspect of black politics. Cissie's exposure to Indian political leaders, in particular Sarojini Naidu, helped to shape her own political trajectory, although there is no evidence from this period that Cissie was considering entering formal politics herself. She seemed content to play celebrity host.

This chapter examines Cissie's transitional years between 1918 and 1927, focusing on her experience of the University of Cape Town, her marriage and her close involvement in 'Indian' politics of the 1920s. Cissie's family life is difficult to piece together from memories, although the account has been enriched through anecdotes related by Cissie's surviving son, Rustum. Nevertheless, the absence of in-depth analysis of her relationship with her husband and children within the District Six community, remains a gap to be filled by later researchers. This period of Cissie's life saw a closeness, in personal and political terms, within and between the Gool and Abdurahman families, that would never be repeated.

the university saw no need to supply accommodation for black students (UCT Archives: F2/1, draft letter UCT Principal to Hoernle (University of the Witwatersrand), 21 February 1941).

⁴For specifically 'Coloured' politics in this period, see G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall: a history of South African 'Coloured' politics*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987, chapter 4.

The University of Cape Town was central to Cissie's political development. As one of only a handful of black students, she developed associations particular to this university, which would set her apart from many others in the District Six community. Had she studied at Fort Hare instead, for example, as it has been suggested she persuaded her sisters-in-law Janub and Zobeida to do, to avoid the racism of UCT,⁵ she would have been exposed to a different experience of racism, and different political perspectives.⁶ Similarly, the timing of her initial sojourn at the University of Cape Town was highly significant. She was among the first black students at the university, and found companionship beyond the Coloured community. This chapter explores some of the challenges facing a young black woman at a predominantly White university, as she set out on a course intended to lead to a medical career. With the exception of a single course, Cissie Abdurahman did not prepare herself academically to become a politician.

The Abdurahman daughters were part of a miniscule minority of black women to matriculate, and then to be accepted into university at this time. Indeed, to judge from the University registers, they were the only ones. If secondary education was rare, and generally considered inappropriate for Muslim girls, tertiary education was almost unheard of in the Capetonian Muslim community. The mothers and fathers of the Abdurahman and Gool daughters were exceptional in their encouragement of university education for their daughters, as Zobeida Booley, nee Gool remembered:

[interviewer:] *Did your mother ... ever worry whether you are going to get married? Was there pressure?*

No, she never worried because she wanted us to be educated in the first place.⁷

This was despite the fact that Waghieda Gool was uneducated in a western system. She did not insist that her daughters remain within the stereotype which she herself reflected, of

⁵Amina Gool in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001. See also, P Ntantala, *A life's mosaic. The autobiography of Phyllis Ntantala*. Cape Town: David Philip and the Mayibuye Centre, 1992, 68 - 77. At the time when Cissie was considering where to study, Fort Hare was called the South African Native College, and although primarily catering for Africans, did admit others classified as 'non-European', which, according to the College's chairman, Dr James Henderson, 'had saved the Government and the European Colleges generally from embarrassment' (*Cape Times*, 10 April 1923).

⁶Zobeida Booley, nee Gool, remembered that she had a friend at Fort Hare, which was why she went there (University of Cape Town Manuscripts and Archives (hereafter UCT M&A): BC 1004, Western Cape Oral History Project, District Six interviews, Zobeida Booley, interviewed by A Adhikari, nd).

mother and housewife. Indeed, Waghieda's youngest daughter, Amina, remembered growing up with a great deal of personal freedom within the family. Both parents supported them in their relatively unrestrained personal development; the Gool sisters became known as 'the Tigresses of District Six'.⁸ Their elder brother, Abdul Hamid supported their intellectual and political development, and, according to Zobeida, paid for her and Jane's university education at Fort Hare.⁹

Irrespective of gender stereotypes, as discussed in Chapter Two, it was difficult for the majority of black South Africans to educate their children, in a context in which education was neither free nor compulsory unless one was classified White. In addition to the luxury of the leisure required to study at tertiary level, was the cost of board and lodgings, tuition, laboratory fees and other sundry expenses. Presumably Dr Abdurahman paid for Cissie and Rosie's education (they did not receive scholarships), another distinct advantage for these intelligent and talented women.¹⁰

Women had been admitted into the South African College in 1887, although there is no evidence that black women applied, and until 1917, the South African College female student body consisted of White women only. By the time that the University of Cape Town was inaugurated, such women were a substantial minority within the student body.¹¹

Although very little research has been undertaken in respect of women at the University, it is clear that gender segregation was built into the infrastructure of the South African College and its successor, the University of Cape Town.¹² For instance, it was accepted as natural that women needed their own residences, and initially very limited space was made available, in Hope's Mill and Arthur's Seat.¹³ Academically, sex segregation depended on the department. In the 1920s, for example, women medical students had their own dissecting room, but purely theoretical classes were not segregated.¹⁴

⁷UCT M&A: BC 1004, Z Booley, interviewed by A Adhikari, nd.

⁸Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 28 August 2001.

⁹UCT M&A: BC 1004, Z Booley interviewed by A Adhikari, nd.

¹⁰UCT Archives: Student Registers, 1918, 383.

¹¹H Phillips, *The University of Cape Town 1918 - 1948: The formative years*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1993, 2, 112 - 113.

¹²F Carr, *Centenary of women on campus 1886/7 - 1986/7*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1987.

¹³Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 120. Similarly, women and men had separate common rooms, and by the mid 1930s if not before, their own swimming pool, or perhaps swimming sessions (*Argus*, 15 May 1937 refers to 'the university women's swimming pool', which is obviously exclusively 'White').

¹⁴Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 91, has a photograph of women students and cadaver.

In the early 1920s, the University blocked the application of a few black, male prospective students. The principle of 'local is acceptable' seems to have been applied, although this was never the official reason for rejections. Rather, interminable delays discouraged students, who were encouraged to study at Fort Hare.¹⁵ As far as Cissie and Rosie were concerned, there is no indication in the Council, Senate or General Purposes Committee minutes of any discussion or correspondence concerning their admittance to the South African College. Their father's position on the City Council, and his friendship with influential liberals on the UCT Council such as J W Jagger and perhaps Eric Walker, may have played a role in their acceptance.¹⁶ Residence within Cape Town was also in their favour. In any case, Waradea and Zainunnissa Abdurahman began their tertiary education at the South African College, which later became incorporated into the University of Cape Town.¹⁷

In the first term of 1917, Cissie and Rosie registered for the Intermediate BA at the College, a preliminary course following matriculation, from which one graduated to a regular BA.¹⁸ They registered for Latin, English, Dutch, Botany, Chemistry and Chemical laboratory work. Rosie also registered for Pure Mathematics, while Cissie chose Zoology instead.¹⁹ Almost a third of those registered for the Intermediate BA were women, none married, and only Rosie and Cissie were black and/ or Muslim, to judge from the names on the register. Examination reports do not exist for 1917, but Cissie seems to have passed English, because she was subsequently exempted from English I.²⁰ There is no evidence, however, regarding any of her other subjects. Nevertheless, in March 1918, both young women registered at what was still officially the South African College, along with 657 other young men and women.²¹ The University of Cape Town was inaugurated on 2 April.

¹⁵UCT Archives: F2/1, 'Non-Europeans'.

¹⁶J W Jagger was, *inter alia*, a powerful member of the University Council, and the Cape Town City Council. He had supported Dr Abdurahman in his quest to have Harold Cressy admitted to the University in the previous decade.

¹⁷See Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, chapter 1, for details of the history of the institution of the university.

¹⁸UCT Archives: Student Registers, 1917. In confirmation, Cissie stated on her 1918 registration form that she had achieved the Intermediate BA at 'College', ie the South African College. See also W Ritchie, *History of the SAC 1829-1918*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1918, 849, which lists both Rosie and Cissie as alumni of the South African College in 1917.

¹⁹She dropped English in the second term, but picked it up for the third and fourth, while she dropped Zoology in the fourth term (UCT Archives: South African College, Student Registration lists, 1917, Intermediate BA).

²⁰UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms 1918, 383.

²¹Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 112.

The University Statute did not permit the exclusion of people on the basis of colour. There was no reference in the Act to colour, but it expressly forbade the exclusion of students or staff on the basis of religion. On paper, the institution had no colour bar, and from time to time made declarations to this effect.²² However, from its inauguration in 1918, the University of Cape Town strove for a 'broad South Africanism', which meant 'that the new university should help to build a united, white South African Nation ... and should try to make its courses available to all whites who met its entrance requirements.'²³ As Howard Phillips has pointed out, '[f]or those who were not white... UCT's "broad South Africanism" meant very restricted access to its classes.'²⁴ Later, in 1923, the Council stated that 'it would not be in the interests of the university to admit native or coloured students in any numbers, if at all.'²⁵ As late as 1952, the University's Principal and Vice-Chancellor, T B Davie, could state that, despite a totally non-racial admission policy (in law), '[t]he proportion of Non-Europeans in the ... students attending the University of Cape Town has never yet reached five per cent.'²⁶

Being a daughter of Dr Abdurahman did not automatically mean the pursuit of a political career, for either Cissie or Rosie. Rather, the evidence suggests that over the years, Cissie considered following in her father's footsteps by studying medicine.²⁷ This may have been encouraged by him, as a logical outcome of his struggle for her education. That Cissie intended to pursue a medical career is suggested from her very first registration at the University in 1918. The registration form did not specifically require mention of the degree for which the student was registering, and Cissie did not write this on her form. Having, presumably, discussed her proposed course with advisors, as every student was required to do,²⁸ Cissie noted her exemption from English I, and planned a curriculum including Physiology, a subject which could lead to a medically-oriented degree. However, when the

²²See, for instance, UCT Archives: Folder F2/1: Non-Europeans, volume I. Letter to unspecified Editor, from TB Davie, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of UCT, 15 December 1952: 'The only condition which governs admission to the University of Cape Town, both in our Act and in our Statutes, is the passing of or exemption from a matriculating examination laid down by law... which examining is open to all irrespective of race, creed or colour.'

²³Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 114.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶UCT Archives: Folder F2/1, Non-Europeans, volume I. Letter to unspecified Editor, from TB Davie, Principal and Vice-Chancellor of University of Cape Town, 15 December 1952.

²⁷See below.

²⁸UCT Archives: Folder F1, Admissions, general.

Principal signed the form, he - or someone using the same red crayon in a similar hand - scribbled 'Arts' at the top of the form.²⁹ Rosie indicated her intention to study medicine more clearly than her sister had: in the space for 'curriculum details', she wrote 'Medical'.

Black exclusion was applied with particular force in the medical faculty at the University of Cape Town. According to Phillips, the MB,ChB was open only to 'European' students, 'lest it lead to mixed classes and white patients being examined by black medical students.'³⁰ Emphasis was placed on clinical teaching, which 'meant that ready access to patients in hospital was essential for staff and students alike. To ensure this, UCT resorted to the Scottish model of the teaching hospital.'³¹ This policy ensured that black students would not be able to complete their training in South Africa, because they were prohibited, by the Hospital Board, from working on White bodies (dead or alive).³² Thus it was possible for black students to register for the first three years of medical training, which were purely theoretical, but then they had to proceed to overseas institutions for their clinical training. This was extremely expensive and beyond the reach of the vast majority of black South Africans.

Beyond the problems facing black candidates for medical training, in 1918 the University was not yet able to offer a full Medical degree.³³ It was only from 1920 that the MB,ChB could be completed at the University. It consisted of a six-year curriculum, with the alternative of a seven-year course in which students initially enrolled in a Medical BA. Having completed the BA, students might then proceed to the MB,ChB.³⁴ Cissie's choice of

²⁹Cissie registered for English II, Zoology I, Latin I and Ethics I, planning to continue in future to Zoology II, Physics I, Chemistry I, and, significantly, Physiology I (UCT Archive: Student Registration Forms, 1918, 383).

³⁰Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 114. See also UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 25 March 1924.

³¹Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 85.

³²Ibid. According to Ayesha Fakir, who has researched the history of UCT's medical faculty, 'the Cape Hospital Board would not allow [black students] access to "white" hospitals and white patients' (Ayesha Fakir, E-mail communication, 20 September 2001.)

³³Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 84.

³⁴The South African College Medical Committee had recommended regulations for this 'Special BA degree Course' degree in August 1917 (UCT Archives: Medical Committee minutes, 9 August 1917). Special courses had been introduced in Chemistry, Physics, Botany and Zoology. Over the following months the Medical Board altered its recommendations regarding the specific curriculum which Medical BA students should follow (UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 25 March 1924, statement by the Principal of the University of Cape Town). Initially it suggested: 'That students taking these special courses with a view to obtaining the BA degree may not take more than three of these special courses in any term; That students taking the special courses with a view to qualifying for Medicine shall take Anatomy during the four terms, and not more than three of the special courses in any one term ... no student shall be permitted to proceed to the second year in Medicine unless he has passed in at least two of the following subjects: Chemistry, Physics, Botany and Zoology'. Then,

subjects for her first two years of study fulfilled the requirements for the Medical BA. Rosie presumably intended to follow this course of study too.³⁵ The letters 'BA' (not MB,ChB) were added to the form later.³⁶

It is practically impossible to identify how many black students intended to follow medical careers. Registration forms did not require racial categorisation in this period.³⁷ One may guess from names, and from places of matriculation, but names can deceive, and many students did not indicate the name of the school from which they had matriculated. At the other end of the course of study, graduation lists are not helpful, as no black people were able to graduate with the MB,ChB degree, and it is impossible to tell from graduation records how many black students graduated with the Medical BA, as the lists do not distinguish between the regular and Medical BA.

According to Zobeida, the racism which Cissie and Rosie faced at the University prompted Cissie to dissuade her and her sister Jane from studying there.³⁸ Based on the information given by two White, Jewish former University of Cape Town students, who, however, were not in Cissie's class in 1918,³⁹ Elizabeth Everett concludes:

[initially Cissie] remained aloof and detached from the other students. Those who did become friendly with her remember her as being very reserved and proud. Once this barrier had been removed she became friendly and her wit and sharp tongue are what people remember best. ... It was members of the Jewish community who were

on 6 October 1917, the Medical Board decided that 'Students proposing to take this Special BA course might ... take in the first year special courses in Chemistry and Botany, Physics and Zoology, and an ordinary qualifying course in Anatomy; in the second year, Anatomy and Physiology, and History or Logic or Ethics or Economics; and in the third year, Physiology, one of the third year Medical subjects and a language' (Ibid., 6 October 1917).

³⁵Cissie registered for Latin, Zoology, Chemistry and Physics for 1918. The BA degree required nine subjects, and she planned to study Chemistry I and II, Botany, Latin, History - but deleted this, Anatomy, Physiology, Physics, Ethics and Zoology (UCT Archives: Student Registration Form, 1918, 307). See also *University of Cape Town Calendar*, 1918: Faculty of Arts and Science, Prospectus.

³⁶UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1918, 307.

³⁷This did not prevent the university from calculating and issuing figures for 'non-European' students in the 1930s. See Chapter Five.

³⁸Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 28 August 2001.

³⁹UCT Archives: Student Register, 1918.

the most friendly towards her and it was them whom she sat with in lectures and spent her free time with.⁴⁰

In October 1918, Cape Town saw devastation wreaked by the Spanish influenza epidemic which travelled the globe in the wake of the World War. As with the plague outbreak in 1901, Cissie's father worked to combat this epidemic. This time he played a far more visible role in mediating between Muslim leaders and the authorities.⁴¹ An elderly District Six resident remembered: 'Dr Abdurahman ... hy was nog jonk en hy het baie mense gehelp met die flu, met die epidemic.'⁴² Cissie and Rosie were fortunate to survive the epidemic. Although Phillips does not provide a breakdown of race against both age and sex, as 'Coloured' people aged between 15 and 25, Cissie and Rosie were vulnerable.⁴³ The epidemic struck Cape Town during the University's mid-year vacation, and the calendar was pushed forward. The final term opened on the last Tuesday in October, and Cissie and Rosie wrote their examinations in the last two weeks of December.⁴⁴

Rosie had failed the special course in Zoology for 'medicals', written in July 1918,⁴⁵ and there is no evidence that she passed any examinations at the end of the year.⁴⁶ She registered again in 1919, but in October she withdrew from the University to study medicine at Glasgow University, where she would have had the benefit of her maternal family's support.⁴⁷ Presumably Dr Abdurahman paid for this course of study, and Nellie had to

⁴⁰E Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool 1897 - 1963: A biography. BA Hons diss., University of Cape Town, 1978, 3. Jewish students constituted approximately 24% of all students in 1919 and 18% in 1924 (Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 113).

⁴¹H Phillips, 'Black October': The impact of the Spanish Influenza epidemic of 1918 on South Africa. PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984, 58; E van Heyningen, Public health and society in Cape Town, 1880-1910, PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, 1989, 345.

⁴²UCT M&A: BC 1004, Western Cape Oral History Project, District Six interviews, Mrs Tiefsa Abrahams, interviewer unknown, nd. Translation: 'He was still young, and helped many people, with the flu, with the epidemic.'

⁴³Phillips, 'Black October', 63 - 64: Table 3, 'Spanish flu deaths in municipal area of Cape Town by race and sex': 'Coloured', Indian and Black females: 30.61% of total deaths in Cape Town. Table 4, 'Spanish 'flu mortality in municipal area of Cape Town per 100 of population by sex': 'Coloured', Black and Indian: female: 3.04. Table 5, 'Spanish flu deaths in municipal area of Cape Town by race and age': 'Coloured', Black and Indian: 15 - 25 years: 645 deaths (14.72% of total deaths).

⁴⁴UCT Archives: General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 23 October 1918, 6 November 1918, 20 November 1918. Graduation itself was held the following April, to coincide with the University's first anniversary.

⁴⁵UCT Archives: General Purposes Committee, Minutes, 31 July 1918.

⁴⁶UCT Archives: Council and Senate Minutes, 1918 - 1919.

⁴⁷UCT Archives: Student Register, 1919. Rosie registered in the first two terms, for Botany and Chemistry in Term I and these subjects as well as Latin in the second term. See also UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1918: 307. The Student Register for 1918 has a later entry stating that she left in October 1919.

acknowledge the hopelessness of her wish to have her children fully educated in South Africa on an equal basis with White students.

According to University records, the only course that Cissie passed at the end of 1918 was in Philosophy: 'Ethics and Politics'.⁴⁸ The course covered 'The development of conduct in the race and in the individual; main types of ethical theory; the principles of political philosophy; the main schools of political theory.'⁴⁹ For Cissie to have shown an interest in, and passed, a course in politics did not surprise me. What was surprising, was the fact that this was the only course in politics that she ever studied. In any case, in addition to any impact the influenza epidemic would have had on her studies, Cissie was diverted from her educational pursuits by personal matters. There is some confusion as to whether or not she registered at the University at the beginning of 1919, but if so, there is no evidence that she completed the year, or even the first two terms.⁵⁰ Like Rosie, Cissie left her parents' home in 1919, but for reasons different to her sister's. Cissie Abdurahman left the home in which she had been born and which had given her support and protection, turned her back on her studies for the moment, and instead embarked on a new chapter of her life: marriage, to Dr A H Gool.

Cissie Gool was remembered as 'the most beautiful bride of the year'. This is borne out by a wedding photograph.⁵¹ As Everett points out, 'no-one who had met Cissie, at any stage of her life, has failed to comment on her outstanding beauty', and this is true of the people who shared their memories with me too.⁵² Everett states that the wedding was 'one of the most spectacular Moslem weddings the Cape had ever seen [and] was followed by a drive through the streets of Cape Town in an open carriage.'⁵³ Cissie's sister-in-law, however, remembers it as a small family affair. The young Minnie, then aged about ten or eleven, did not join in

⁴⁸UCT Archives: Senate Minutes, 8 January 1919. She passed in Class III.

⁴⁹UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 15 November 1917 - 27 January 1920: Faculty of Arts, Syllabuses.

⁵⁰According to her 1922 registration form, Cissie Abdurahman had been registered in 1919, but there is no registration form for her for 1919, and no mention in the General Purposes Committee minutes, or those of the Council or Senate, both of which recorded all examination results. There are no Examination Reports for 1919, so it cannot be confirmed that she did not register for subjects and fail them all. However, it seems likely that she was not in fact a student in 1919.

⁵¹Y S Rassool, *District Six - Lest we forget. Recapturing subjugated cultural histories of Cape Town (1897 - 1956)*. Bellville: Faculty of education, University of the Western Cape, 2000, 20.

⁵²Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 4.

⁵³Ibid.

the post-Mosque celebrations, but played outside.⁵⁴ The precise date of the wedding has been forgotten, but it was some time in 1919, in the aftermath of the Spanish influenza epidemic.

It has been suggested that the marriage was arranged, which would make sense in the context of Cape Muslim traditions.⁵⁵ As a former resident of District Six related:

The old people were very strict. They wanted you to get married and wanted to see you get married and to whom you get married.⁵⁶

Abdul Gool's father himself was not averse to the idea of arranged marriages. As Abdul's sister, Zobeida, recalled:

My father came once or twice and said would we like to, you know, arrange a marriage. But we knew the person and we really felt that he wouldn't be suitable. So we would say very nicely to my father: No. And he took it in a reasonable way ... so he just stopped trying to arrange a marriage.⁵⁷

Zobeida's words suggest that, had her father proposed a more 'suitable' match, she might have been interested. The idea itself was not anathema to her and her sister.

The marriage between Abdul and Cissie suited both Dr Abdurahman, who worked closely with the young Dr Gool, and Abdul's father, Yusuf Gool, a wealthy Indian trader who had made a fortune in the South African War. He had tried to mould his eldest son in Abdurahman's image. According to Abdul's nephew, Yousuf Rassool, 'the bond between Dr Abdurahman and my grandfather ... brought the beautiful Zainunnissa, called Cissy [sic], and my uncle, Dr A H Gool, together and their marriage followed in the fullness of time.'⁵⁸ Certainly, A H Gool and Dr Abdurahman had much in common. They shared medical, financial, educational, and social concerns, as well as a love for fishing.⁵⁹ Both were known as 'the Doctor', and were among the most highly respected residents of District Six. Their families basked in their reputations, which shielded them from attacks by

⁵⁴ Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001.

⁵⁵ A B, in conversation with the author, 13 December 1999.

⁵⁶ UCT M&A: BC 1004, Western Cape Oral History Project, District Six interviews, Ebrahim Albertus, interviewed by S Jeppe, 9 December 1987.

⁵⁷ UCT M&A: BC 1004, Western Cape Oral History Project, District Six interviews, Z Booley, interviewed by A Adhikari, nd.

⁵⁸ Rassool, *District Six*, 22.

'skollies' on more than one occasion.⁶⁰ Their lives were closely intertwined, and A H Gool's marriage with Cissie Abdurahman cemented this relationship.⁶¹

On the other hand, it is just as likely that the marriage was not arranged, but was based on mutual attraction, not between fathers, but between Abdul and Cissie themselves. Their courtship took place during the Spanish influenza epidemic, when presumably there would have been little thought of chaperoning couples, and when their awareness of the deaths around them would have heightened the value of their relationship. Moreover, had the marriage been arranged, it would have been more likely that the eldest Gool son would have married the elder Abdurahman daughter. Whatever the paths leading to this marriage, Cissie married a highly respected Islamic scholar, who, however, would not expect her to fulfill traditional Muslim gender roles. He would not stand in the way of her education, or a career. Dr Gool would have been in little doubt that his young bride would not fulfil the role of a submissive stay-at-home Muslim house-wife.⁶²

After the wedding, the couple travelled to the Transvaal and Natal. As a person classified 'Coloured', Cissie could travel freely from one province to another at the time, but her husband, classified 'Indian', could not enter the Transvaal without a pass.⁶³ This he obtained.⁶⁴ The humiliation experienced by such a man would not have passed Cissie by, and she would support both her husband and her father in protesting against discrimination against South African Indians.

⁵⁹Cape Archives (hereafter CA): MOOC 67759: Estate papers, Abdullah Abdurahman; UCT M&A: BC 1004, Western Cape Oral History Project, District Six interviews, Z Booley, interviewed by A Adhikari, nd; Rustum Gool, in telephonic conversation with the author, 23 February 2002.

⁶⁰Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001.

⁶¹Everett asserts that Cissie Abdurahman met A H Gool in 1919 (Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 3), but it is clear that Cissie had known him since 1911. See Chapter Three.

⁶²Mrs Dollie, related by marriage to the Gools, recalled of her mother, she worked at Tobacco Co., Kloof Street, Cape Town, but 'after she got married she never worked again after that day.' (UCT M&A: BC 1004, Western Cape Oral History Project, District Six interviews, December 1985, interviewer unknown.)

⁶³In terms of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1903 (Natal), Indians could only enter the Transvaal if they were issued with a special permit. This was amended by Act No 3 of 1906, which imposed further restrictions on Indians. Act No 15 of 1907 (Transvaal) enacted the total prohibition of Indians into the Transvaal, amended by the Asiatic Law Amendment Act (1907), in terms of which Indians had to register, or face a £100 fine or three months' imprisonment. The Asiatic Registration Amendment Act no 36 of 1908 (Transvaal) enacted that in addition to registration, Indians must carry passes. The South Africa Act of 1909 provided no safeguards for the rights of Indians.

⁶⁴It was kept in the Gool family safe for decades until it was stolen with other papers (Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001).

In 1920 and 1921, Cissie Gool did not register at the University. Neither did she seek paid employment - she would never do this, despite various attempts to study for a number of different professions.⁶⁵ Instead, she attended to her definition of role of 'housewife' and 'mother'. Her and Abdul's first child, Rustum, was born on 7 March, 1920.⁶⁶ A highly intelligent boy, Rustum would follow in his father's footsteps and eventually qualify as a medical doctor, one of the first locally-educated black doctors.⁶⁷ He was also artistically talented, and as a young man, his self-portrait was published in the *Cape Standard*.⁶⁸ His father was deeply interested in the arts, being prepared, for instance, to sit alone in the 'non-European' section of the City Hall to enjoy Opera; he passed this passion (and many works of art) on to his son.⁶⁹ Rustum knew his father as a gentle man, who took great care of his young son. His earliest memory is of one evening when he was about two years old. He remembered:

a remittance man as they called these Britishers who were sent out to the Colonies on a monthly allowance. A great many were chronic alcoholics, and certainly this one was. About 7 pm there was a banging on the front door and I heard my father say, 'Be quiet! My son is sleeping and you may wake him up!' At this juncture I began to yell my head off. At this point my father grabbed Thompson, if that was his name, by the scruff of the neck and bundled him down the steps, along the path and ejected him into the street. I had achieved something by my intervention, and my brain registered the fact.⁷⁰

Of his mother at this time, Rustum recalled:

My mother ... was but a memory. Perhaps she was suckling my sister Marcina, 2 years younger than I was, and no doubt as she had suckled me.⁷¹

⁶⁵See Chapter Five.

⁶⁶According to Everett, Rustum was born in 1923 (Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 4. Her source is *Cape Times*, 13 December 1962). However, Rustum Gool confirmed (via E-mail, 23 October 2001) that he was born in 1920.

⁶⁷Rustum Gool studied at the University of Cape Town in the late 1930s, and transferred to the University of the Witwatersrand, from where he graduated in 1945. The latter was the first White university in South Africa to provide the full medical degree for black students.

⁶⁸UCT M&A: BCZA 83/33, Abdurahman family collection, microfilm, reel 4. The original is in the possession of Mr B de Vries of Cape Town.

⁶⁹B Hirson, *The Cape Town intellectuals: Ruth Schechter and her Circle, 1907-1934*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001, 170 - 171.

⁷⁰Rustum Gool, E-mail to author, 19 March 2002.

⁷¹Ibid.

Marcina was born in 1922, by which time Cissie had returned to the University. Cissie may have breast-fed her children, but she did not care for them full-time; 'nannies' were employed for this purpose. It is difficult to know what it meant for Cissie to be a 'married woman', sister-in-law to the 'Tigresses of District Six'.⁷² Her and Abdul's residential geography is also difficult to pin down in chronological terms. Initially, it seems, they resided in his parents' large house in Buitensingel Street, where, as Ray Alexander later recalled, Abdul's father housed his polygynous family, a symbol of Yusuf Gool's wealth and status.⁷³ His fortune had diminished by the time of his eldest son Abdul's marriage, and Abdul was responsible for his parents' care, and also saw to the educational needs of his sisters.

At some stage Cissie and Abdul removed to 48 Searle Street, perhaps after Rustum's birth. He had no memories of living in Buitensingel, but remembered with great fondness visiting his paternal grandmother, who called him 'Beta', which means beloved.⁷⁴ Nellie Abdurahman is also remembered with fondness, and Rustum visited Mount Street often too. The extended Gool and Abdurahman families certainly helped to care for Cissie's children, and formed a dynasty of care, as well as status, within the District Six community.

Locating 48 Searle Street in the broader social geography of District Six, Rustum recalled:

[W]hen my father took his young bride to their new home it was the largest and only residence of its sort at the other end of the district [to Mount Street] on the dividing line between the Town and the next suburb, Woodstock. Across the road was Trafalgar Park stretching from Windsor Street at the top down to Sir Lowry Road at the bottom. On our side of the street was a most interesting and diverse series of institutions and businesses. At the top was the Catholic convent with its attached Primary School, then a few cottages and then came the only institution of its kind in the city. St Columbus Home, a large square compound lined with quarters for African workers and premises for a supervisor, and next was a block of unbuilt land.

⁷² Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 28 August 2001.

⁷³ Ray Alexander, unpublished autobiography, in the possession of the author. See also Rassool, *District Six*.

⁷⁴ Rustum Gool, E-mail to the author, 6 March 2002 (the day before his 82nd birthday). See UCT M&A: BC 506, Waradea Abdurahman collection, for undated photographs of Nellie, Cissie, Rustum (as a child of about five years of age) and A H Gool.

African workers from St Columbus' Home were employed as gardeners by the Gools.

Rustum loved the garden at 48 Searle Street:

I recall tricycling in the large garden on the paths which encircled the many rose beds. How appropriate! In North India, in the foothills of the Himalayas was a small Principality called Gulistan, meaning 'Land of the Roses', and it was from there that my paternal Grandfather had originated.⁷⁵

When Marcina was still a baby, the 'nanny' would take the children to Trafalgar Park:

During these early years baby-sitting was handed over to nurse-maids who used to trundle the pram probably containing Marcina down in the special wooded park near Sir Lowry Rd and I used to trail along. And where was Cissie during this period. I think she was contemplating obtaining a degree at UCT and maybe even scanning text-books.⁷⁶

As they walked to the park, Rustum would take note of his neighbours:

Next door to us was a large cottage at No 44 with a shiny brass plate emblazoned with the name 'NORWAY' and there it was that the local policeman resided a fearsome 6 foot tall Norwegian by the name of Swanson. Then across Hyde St came another school and attached residence of the 'German' Lutheran Church. After that was Cape Town's largest bakery, Attwell's Bakery and its vast courtyard for delivery vans and adjoining was the Premier Wire and Gate Fencing Company exuding loud buzzing and whirring sounds during working hours. And then a few large storehouses to Sir Lowry Rd.⁷⁷

Rustum also remembered the cosmopolitan character of the neighbourhood. He recalled that:

In those days there was no apartheid. We were surrounded on all sides by Whites. I well remember lower Nile St and on the other side of our fence were several large cottages occupied by Whites. I well remember the names of those who lived over the fence: Chiapini (Italian), Featherstone (English), Viret (French Huguenot) and Theunissen (Norwegian). A few years later I got to know the people who lived in a large greystone double-storied house near the top of Trafalgar Park. The gentleman

⁷⁵Rustum Gool, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2002.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Ibid.

who resided there was I think surnamed Houghton and was of Scots origin. He was the chief Park keeper of the whole area and I got to be friendly with his two sons Alex and Maxwell, the latter becoming a good friend of mine in my early teens and I well remember him coming over to spend time with me during one of the periods when I was laid up.⁷⁸

My impression of Rustum's life as a young pre-school child is that he spent a lot of time alone, or under the supervision of domestic workers. When he was older, however, his mother took a far more active role in guiding his life. He recalled:

Certainly she took my early education into her hands. The three R's were spelt out loud and clear. This was the time of Fairy Tales and the Brothers Grimm, writing with pencils and crayons and doing simple sums but it did not stop there. When I was about six, Cissie's two cousins, the adopted nephews of 'AA' who had both become Principals of Muslim schools were both pressed into service. Between Sunny and Usshie I received at least two sessions a week after school hours.⁷⁹

Cissie also took on the task of disciplining Rustum, who remembered one occasion when his father saved him:

But there was another side to my mother. She was a disciplinarian and this harked back to her own childhood when 'AA' watched over his two daughters and wielded the rod if not literally, certainly in a figurative manner of speaking. But I was not so lucky. I remember on one occasion when I had been a naughty boy I stood in the conservatory and watched my mother selecting a stout twig from the fig tree and then she came up and laid into my bottom. I certainly yelled my head off and luckily for me my Dad arrived back home from the Surgery for lunch and said, 'Cissie, I think that's quite enough!' A Saviour indeed.⁸⁰

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid. Rustum continued: 'Sunny's given names were A E and may have been Abdul Ebrahim but Usshie the younger was Ashraf. At that time Sunny was running the Rahmanyah [sic] Muslim School and across the town in the "Bo-Kaap" Ashraf was in charge of Scotsche Kloof Muslim School. ... these two gentlemen did a great job and I also remembered them kindly when A A took me down to St James and I was plonked into the Rondavel with these two mature teenagers. They were the bait catchers and early in the morning they would take me down to the rocks and scour about eventually producing enough "room-aas" or red-bait to satisfy the boss-fisherman. On occasion they would capture an octopus with their 3-pronged hook. Actually I remember having the most vivid nightmare when sleeping in a bed in the cottage and screaming out: There's a sea-caat {octopus} under my bed! The house-keeper had to switch on the light and convince me that it was not so!'

⁸⁰Ibid.

As Rustum grew into his teens, he spent a lot of time with the men of the family, fishing. This was one of his maternal grandfather's loves: his father had become friendly with Abdurahman over fishing, and when Rustum was considered old enough, he would go along too. Women seem to have played no part in these leisure activities, and would therefore have been excluded from conversations between men. Cissie, however, does not give the impression of a person who would have wanted to go fishing. In the 1920s, she seems to have preferred to host tea parties.

Cissie is remembered universally as a socialite, and always dressed in the latest western style. Rustum recalled that:

About once a fortnight the sisters Kannemeyer if I remember their names would come to 48 from Walmer Estate armed with their pattern books, materials and tape measures, not forgetting mouthfuls of plain pins to ensure that Cissie Gool was always in the height of fashion.⁸¹

Cissie Gool always lived a full social life, including regular bridge evenings and tennis. Rustum Gool remembered that his parents leased a tennis court at Trafalgar Park, and that his father 'actually found time to join in these games', although Cissie seems to have played host.⁸² According to her sister-in-law, she was responsible for establishing the Union Tennis Club, which was dominated by, if not exclusive to, her friends, including some at the University of Cape Town.⁸³

She had a host of friends. Saturday afternoons was tennis and tea and biscuits were taken across by the maids with cold drinks for those who preferred them ... On Sunday mornings about 11 am ladies would gather at 48 and it was tea parties with special iced little cakes which had been sent up from Attwells. Dress and fashion were uppermost in the ladies' minds but a bit of mild scandal held all ears.⁸⁴

These gatherings are surveyed through the lens of a young child, who saw iced cakes in gatherings of women. I see traces of women's networks, which were profoundly muted in

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Rustum Gool, in telephonic conversation with the author, 24 February 2002, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2002.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

the sources on which this thesis draws, but which are a staple of feminist biographical narratives.⁸⁵

The marriage between Cissie and Dr Gool is remembered as 'amicable', although Cissie 'always valued her independence'.⁸⁶ Importantly, this was not a family in which the father always had the last word. A H Gool was similar to his father-in-law in some ways, at first glance, but his personality could not have been more different. To his friends he was 'cynical and gay',⁸⁷ to his son, a gentle, kind 'Great Provider'.⁸⁸ To Cissie, he was a friend, and never laid down the law in the way that Abdurahman would have done.⁸⁹ Rustum pointed out to me that they always 'talked things through'. This enabled their friendship to last until the end of Cissie's life, despite their having chosen different life paths, and partners, by the end of the decade.⁹⁰

Cissie's circle of friendship was widening in this period. The evidence suggests that around this time, she was becoming involved in circles to the left of the APO, through her friendship with Ruth Alexander. Ruth, a close friend of Olive Schreiner, was older than Cissie.⁹¹ She and her husband Morris, Member of the Legislative Assembly and City Councillor, had been regular visitors in Albert Lodge when Cissie was a child.⁹² As Cissie grew to young adulthood, she and Ruth became friends. The two women organised a small drama circle, which met in St James on the Muizenberg coast. Amina Gool remembers them, both strong-willed women, always taking the leading roles in the dramas they performed, while Amina, as the youngest member, was forced to take the lesser roles.⁹³

Early in 1922, Cissie Gool again registered at the University of Cape Town, an unprecedented act for a married Muslim woman in South Africa.⁹⁴ She had recently given

⁸⁵For an early example of the need to look for women's support networks, see C G Heilbrun, *Writing a woman's life*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1988.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷E and W Roux, *Rebel Pity: The life of Eddie Roux*. London: Rex Collins, 1970.

⁸⁸Rustum Gool, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2002.

⁸⁹Cissie would never have referred to her husband's 'orders' as Nellie did in her 1909 letter to Abdurahman, as discussed in Chapter Two.

⁹⁰Rustum Gool, telephonic conversation with the author, 24 March 2002.

⁹¹See Chapter Two.

⁹²See Chapter Two.

⁹³Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001.

⁹⁴UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1922, 937.

birth to her second child, Marcina, on 2 March.⁹⁵ She could not easily have returned to the university at this time without the support or at least acquiescence of her husband, in addition to her own tenacious determination, and child-care provision. Given the fact that so few Muslim women had any formal education at all, and that married women were expected to stay at home and care for households and children, for a married Muslim woman, let alone a mother with a young child, to attend university would have bordered on the scandalous. *Drum* later reported, 'after her second baby was born she returned to complete her BA and go on to take her MA - hurrying out to feed her baby during lectures!'⁹⁶ If this report is not merely an urban legend, it may have happened once or twice, but it is clear that normally Marcina, along with her brother, was cared for at home by a domestic worker. Moreover, there were no child-care facilities at the University.⁹⁷

In 1922, Cissie registered at the University for the first time as 'Zainunnissa Gool'. The appellation 'Mrs' was added in a different hand, in pencil. She was the only married woman to register for a BA for many years. By now the registration form required details of the 'Degree ... for which student is working', and she entered 'Medical BA', which confirms that this had probably been her plan all along.⁹⁸ On the reverse of the form, Cissie noted her busy weekly timetable. On Mondays, she planned to attend Chemistry lectures from 10am - 11am, Physics from 11 to 12, with practicals in the afternoon. Mondays she also studied Latin II. On Tuesday and Wednesdays she had to attend classes in Chemistry and Physics, with Latin on Tuesdays. Thursdays were devoted to Latin, Physics and Zoology, and Friday, Physics and Zoology.⁹⁹

Howard Phillips has noted that, among Zoology students at the time, 'the overwhelming majority of [the] department's students were "medicals" taking only a half course in zoology.'¹⁰⁰ Cissie was one of these 'medicals'. There are no Examination reports for 1922, but despite the uninspiring nature of the Zoology Department, she achieved a first class pass

⁹⁵Rustum Gool, E-mail to author, 23 October 2001. Everett, following a *Cape Times* article, states inaccurately that Marcina was born 'at the end of 1931, shortly before she was due to write her final examination.' (Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 7.)

⁹⁶*Drum*, June 1981.

⁹⁷UCT Archives: Examination reports. These indicate the status of women, whether 'Miss' or 'Mrs'. Cissie was always the only 'Mrs' in her classes. Women on the staff were forced to resign on marriage.

⁹⁸UCT Archives: Council and Senate minutes, 1919. See also F2/1, 'Non-European Students': statistics compiled by Registrar, UCT, 1937 ff.

⁹⁹UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1922, 937.

in the Zoology Special Course. Her interest in this subject would stand her in good stead in the late 1920s, when she came to know a new circle of intellectuals, the centre of which was Lancelot Hogben, who enlivened the Zoology Department later in the decade.¹⁰¹

Phillips notes that, for most students, there was little social contact with staff.¹⁰² This was not the case with Cissie. As her son later remembered, she 'certainly had the capacity for getting on with her lecturers'.¹⁰³ On her 1922 registration form Cissie indicated that she was going to take a full year course in Latin, presumably with Ben Farrington. He had joined the Department in 1920, and was Ruth Alexander's lover, for whom she would later leave her husband. Cissie had met Ben through Ruth, and he would join her tennis parties on Saturday afternoons.¹⁰⁴ Having a good friend on the staff of the university would have made a significant difference to Cissie. Cissie was almost Ben's age, 25 to his 27, and substantially older than most of her classmates. As a mature student, her associations would have tended to be easier with staff than with other students.¹⁰⁵ In 1922 and 1923, Ben Farrington was the main lecturer with whom Cissie could have conversed as political ally; later others came to dominate her University-based friendships.¹⁰⁶

As noted earlier, Cissie's main friends within the student body were Jewish. Racism among students is not easily traced in these years, whereas by the late 1930s, the National Society of Student Unions, NUSAS, had decided to support black students' attendance at academic functions (classes) but not at social or sporting events.¹⁰⁷ This reflected the increasingly racist nature of White South Africa at that time; for the early twenties it is easier to trace racism at the highest level of the University administration. Between 1921 and 1923, while Cissie was studying, the Council and Senate debated the issue of admitting new 'non-

¹⁰⁰Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 57.

¹⁰¹Of the other Special Courses, she passed Botany, but failed Chemistry and Physics, being granted a supplementary examination in the latter, which she may have written in February 1923, but if so, did not pass (UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 18 December 1922: 'Schedule of Examination Results in December'; Council Minutes, 27 March 1923: 'Supplementary Examinations February 1923').

¹⁰²Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 118.

¹⁰³Rustum Gool, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2002.

¹⁰⁴Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001. For Ruth's relationship with Ben, see B Hirson, *The Cape Town intellectuals: Ruth Schechter and her Circle, 1907-1934*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001, xviii, 122 - 140. Chapter 6 is entitled 'Enter Ben Farrington'.

¹⁰⁵It is unknown whether she sat the examination for Latin, but if so, she did not pass it. Neither was she given a supplementary examination (UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 18 December 1922, 27 March 1923).

¹⁰⁶See Chapter Five.

¹⁰⁷UCT Archives: F2/1, 'non-Europeans', clippings and correspondence, 1937.

European' students to the University, even though there was no ambiguity whatsoever in the Constitution. While the University could not discriminate on the basis of race, or any criterion other than academic achievement, it did debate other means of excluding black students, primarily those who were not local.¹⁰⁸ Cissie did not engage publicly with the issue of student exclusions. Her mind was not fully focused on her studies in 1923, when she registered for the last time for the Medical BA. She seems to have dropped out during the year, and there is no evidence of her having written examinations that year.¹⁰⁹ She did not reregister until 1929, by which time her sights had shifted for the time being from a career in medicine.¹¹⁰ There was a very good reason to abandon her studies temporarily at this point. Politics of a very personal nature came to the fore. She joined her husband, and her father, in fighting against anti-Indian legislation. According to Cherryl Walker, '[t]he widespread assumption that politics was properly a male preserve went unchallenged while black leaders concentrated on more urgent matters',¹¹¹ and H J Lubbe has stated that '[m]ost women, who, living as they did in a patriarchal society, were accustomed to leaving party politics to men, allowed themselves to be content with this.'¹¹² In the 1920s, these statements fairly accurately reflect Cissie Gool's position from the point of view of leadership, but she was involved, in the background.

Although Dr Abdurahman's primary political identity in this period was as a leader of Coloured politics, he worked to facilitate the affiliation of different black organisations.¹¹³ His involvement in the South African Indian struggles of the 1920s was certainly an aspect of his vision of black unity, but it also reflected personal concerns, as a man who at one level identified himself as Indian. His wife, his younger daughter and his son-in-law all participated in the protest campaign which culminated in the Cape Town Agreement of

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Her registration form indicated an intention to take two Special Courses in Chemistry, as well as Physics and Anatomy. There is no evidence of her having passed any of these courses (UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1923, 1052). There are no registration forms for Zainunnissa Gool from 1924 through 1928. Her 1929 registration form indicates that her previous date of registration was 1922. (Student Registration Forms, 1929, 1448).

¹¹⁰UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1923, 1052.

¹¹¹C Walker, The women's suffrage movement: the politics of gender, race and class. In C Walker, ed. *Women and gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1990, 314.

¹¹²H J Lubbe, The myth of the 'Black Peril': *Die Burger* and the 1929 election. *South African Historical Journal* 37(1997), 120.

¹¹³Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, 78.

1927, between the South African and Indian governments.¹¹⁴ Cissie's involvement in this campaign would have important implications for her later political trajectories; in the 1940s, she would not hesitate to lead a delegation of supporters to the Transvaal and Durban in protest against anti-Indian legislation. Similarly, through hosting foreign politicians in her home, Cissie had the opportunity to consider her own potential, as a black woman, in South African politics. Although Cissie Gool was not a public figure in the 1920s, she was actively involved, behind the scenes.¹¹⁵

Since the passage of the South Africa Act of 1909, which had provided no safeguards for Indian rights, a barrage of legislation had been passed, progressively restricting them.¹¹⁶ Mohandas Gandhi's passive resistance campaign had been followed closely by both the Abdurahman and Gool families.¹¹⁷ According to one source, Gandhi had encouraged A H Gool to become an active political leader, but he had declined at that time.¹¹⁸ Gandhi had visited Abdullah and Nellie at Albert Lodge, and his cause was publicised in the pages of the *APO*. Lewis positions this reportage within Dr Abdurahman's broader vision of black unity.¹¹⁹ However, there was a qualitative difference between Abdurahman's dealings with African leaders, and the Indian protest campaigns. For the latter, he took on the role of leader. Abdurahman was criticised for supposedly opportunistic involvement in the protest campaign. However, such criticism ignores the extent to which Abdurahman saw himself, at one level, as Indian.¹²⁰

¹¹⁴For details of the Agreement, see B Pachai, *The international aspects of the South African Indian Question 1860 - 1971*. Cape Town: C Struik, 1971; S Bhana, and B Pachai. *A documentary history of Indian South Africans, 1862 - 1982*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1984. Decades later, in 1946, Councillor Mrs Z Gool would lead a delegation of Capetonians to Durban to participate in the Passive Resistance Campaign, led by Y M Dadoo and GM Naicker, in an attempt to mobilise international opinion against the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Bill (known as the Ghetto Bill) of that year (Y M Dadoo, *Facts about the Ghetto Act*. Killie Campbell Africana Library, Durban and University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1993, 8). Cissie's involvement has been viewed by some observers as opportunistic, but in fact it was linked to personal ties to the 'Indian' protest movement of the 1920s.

¹¹⁵E S Reddy, *India and the struggle against apartheid*. Extract from *Third World Impact*, 7th ed. Np: Hansib, United Nations, Nd.

¹¹⁶For a list of the relevant legislation, see, for instance, G M Naicker (comp), *A historical synopsis of the Indian Question in South Africa*. Durban and Pietermaritzburg: Killie Campbell Africana Library and the University of Natal, 1993.

¹¹⁷*Cape Argus*, 6 October 1913; *Cape Times* 30 September 1913; UCT M&A: BCZA 85/21, Dr Abdurahman collection, microfilm, reel 1.

¹¹⁸Rassool, *District Six*, 6.

¹¹⁹Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, 78.

¹²⁰Nellie's recollection that the young Abdullah had portrayed himself to her as Indian is one example of this (See Chapter One).

In 1923, the South African Prime Minister announced that the 'Indian Problem' was a domestic issue, and that 'no outside influence would be tolerated.'¹²¹ In January 1924, the government announced its intention 'to proceed with legislation in the form of the Class Areas Bill to provide for the compulsory trading and residential segregation of Indians.'¹²² In response, the Natal Indian Congress invited Sarojini Naidu to visit South Africa.¹²³ A member of the Indian National Congress, Naidu was then in Kenya, presiding over the East African Indian National Congress. 'It was felt that her presence in South Africa during this crucial phase in the life of the Indians would have a salutary effect on them.'¹²⁴ She agreed, and indicated that she would arrive in Natal at the end of February.

In the meantime, the Natal Indian Congress organised a mass meeting to protest against the Class Areas Bill, which intended to introduce racial segregation in residence and trading rights. A delegation interviewed the Minister of the Interior. The Transvaal British Indian Association also held a mass protest meeting at the end of January:

Indians in South Africa were terribly agitated by the Government's intention and were resolved to fight the Bill all the way, though even then there was little hope of success.¹²⁵

Further representations to the Minister by a joint delegation representing the Cape British Indian Council, the NIC and the TBIA failed to achieve anything. Dr Abdurahman led this delegation, representing Indians in the Cape Province. The South African Indian Congress reported that:

Dr Abdurahman, MPC of the Cape Province, introduced the deputation with a spirited speech. The Minister gave the deputation a sympathetic hearing and denied that it was intended to degrade, ruin or oppress the Indians; on the contrary to provide them [with] separate [areas] where they can reasonably live and trade according to their best ideas and develop according to their own lines and civilisation.'¹²⁶

Sarojini Naidu arrived in the country at the end of February.

¹²¹Pachai, *International aspects*, 106.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Bhana and Pachai, *A documentary history*, 153, 155.

¹²⁴Pachai, *International aspects*, 106.

¹²⁵Ibid., 106 - 7.

Mrs Naidu ... was expected to take an active part in the attempts to improve the lot of the Indians in the country. Mrs Naidu's first important task was the Class Areas Bill which Gandhi, in a statement issued in India, called a breach of the compromise of 1914.¹²⁷

In the South African context, women were excluded from overt political leadership roles.¹²⁸ Regardless of such prejudice, Mrs Naidu immediately got to work. At no time was her expertise and leadership questioned. She had expected to stay in the Gool home in Buitencingel Street, where her close ally Mohandas Gandhi had stayed during his visits to Cape Town. However, Cissie put her foot down and insisted that this powerful leader stay with her and A H Gool, which she did, apparently for two months.¹²⁹ As one informant remembered it, 'Cissie had inherited her parents' love of entertaining and throughout [Sarojini Naidu's] stay the house was constantly full of visitors.'¹³⁰ Rustum Gool remembered:

After this tennis-playing era of my parents lives there started the time of the Saturday night parties and the guests began to include a variety of educationalists, musicians, artists and even a few politicians ... the artists and musicians abounded at these parties and my Dad began to acquire an interesting collection of paintings. Foremost at the time was Irma Stern but the walls became lined with those of Wolf Kibel, Gregoire Boonzaier, Terence McCaw and sculptures by Lippy Lipschitz.¹³¹

Yousuf Rassool has described in vivid terms the weekly parties hosted at Cissie and A H Gool's residence in Searle Street, on Saturday nights. For him, these parties had little to do with Cissie. Representing A H Gool as extremely cynical, Rassool recalls these gatherings as:

unique in all South Africa for that time - a place where all the leading luminaries in the political and cultural arena would foregather for him to enjoy their verbal

¹²⁶Bhana and Pachai, *A documentary history*, 153.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 107.

¹²⁸Rustum remembered that, when the Prince of Wales visited the country, Abdurahman had introduced his five year old nephew to the Prince, and that no women were part of the welcoming delegation. He supposed that his mother might have been watching from a distance, in one of the dignitaries' cars (telephonic conversation with the author, 24 March 2002).

¹²⁹Amina Gool, in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001.

¹³⁰Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 4.

¹³¹Rustum Gool, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2002.

squabbles while they caroused till the cock crew. There at Searle Street he could indulge his taste for art and music with politics thrown in for seasoning.¹³²

But others remembered the gatherings as Cissie's parties: it depended on one's point of view.¹³³ By the mid-1920s, the Gool parties were the talk of the town. Everett writes of Cissie Gool playing 'hostess to the stream of visitors who came either to stay or to attend their glittering parties ... anybody who was anybody wanted to know the Gools and hoped to be invited to one of their parties.'¹³⁴

Sarojini Naidu focused on the Class Areas Bill, interviewing Smuts, Duncan, the leaders of the Opposition and numerous other members of Parliament. She was also present in Parliament when the Bill was discussed, and was shocked by the prejudice and ignorance displayed by the Members of Parliament who participated in the debate, and by their gross misrepresentation of facts.¹³⁵ Dr Abdurahman would later praise Mrs Naidu for the central role that she had played in the negotiations which culminated in the Cape Town Agreement of 1927.¹³⁶

From Cissie's point of view, Sarojini Naidu was an invaluable role model, embodying the possibilities for black women as political leaders, who could speak out on the people's behalf. A poet as well as a politician, Naidu was fearless and articulate, a powerful speaker who was highly respected by governments, as well as by her supporters in South Africa, East Africa and India itself. Her gender did not inhibit or retard her effectiveness and popularity. She was, in short, a highly successful black woman politician in an era in which such women were not evident in South Africa. Cissie had the model of her mother - a White woman, albeit honorarily black - and the APO Women's Guild, but this organisation never produced women with a mandate to speak on behalf of men as well as women. Sarojini Naidu was not a member of a women's auxiliary; she was president of the East African Indian Congress, and a member of the Indian National Congress. In the following year, she would be elected its first woman president.

¹³²Rassool, *District Six*, 6.

¹³³Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 4; Ray Alexander, personal communication.

¹³⁴Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 4.

¹³⁵Pachai, *International aspects*, 108.

¹³⁶UCT M&A: BCZA 85/21, Abdullah Abdurahman collection, microfilm, reel one.

Moreover, of major importance from Cissie's perspective, Sarojini Naidu was elected to the presidency of the South African Indian Congress in November 1925, the first woman ever to preside over a national political organisation in this country. Dr A H Gool was elected Deputy-President, and for the next few years would play a prominent role in Indian politics.¹³⁷ Cissie would follow in Mrs Naidu's footsteps in 1935, when she agreed to preside over the National Liberation League. In so doing, Cissie would become the first South African woman to be elected to such a position of leadership. Moreover, Cissie could learn from Naidu's involvement in local government. *The Star* would later report that the latter 'has been for a long time past one of the principal leaders in the municipal affairs of [Bombay] and a member of the Bombay Municipal Council.'¹³⁸ Sarojini Naidu's influence on Cissie Gool cannot be exaggerated.¹³⁹ Cissie's friend, Zelda Friedlander, wrote:

In many respects [Cissie] was not unlike Mrs Sarojini Naidu, the Indian poet, for Cissie possessed her drive, her delightful way of injecting humour into every situation.¹⁴⁰

At the end of 1925, Dr Abdurahman - not Dr Gool, despite the fact that the latter was Deputy-President of the SAIC - led a deputation to India to appeal to the Viceroy to intervene in South Africa against the continued discriminatory treatment of Indians. As Gavin Lewis notes:

The deputation did have some success. Under pressure from the Indian and British authorities, the [South African] government agreed to a round-table conference ... [which] resulted in the Cape Town Agreement of 1927, providing for the appointment of an Indian Agent-general in the Union, and for fairer treatment of Indians, in return for the Indian government's acceptance of a scheme for the voluntary repatriation of South African Indians. For the APO Abdurahman's role as leader of the deputation gave him a public platform to push for black unity.'¹⁴¹

¹³⁷*Cape Times*, 9 November 1925.

¹³⁸*The Star*, 7 October 1926, in UCT M&A: BCZA 85/21, Abdullah Abdurahman collection, microfilm, reel 1.

¹³⁹Sarojini Naidu also played a role in furthering broader black co-operation, spear-headed by Abdurahman. As Lewis reports: 'black unity became the pivot of the APO's efforts to fight the Pact government's legislation ... Encouraged by the visit to South Africa of Mrs S Naidu, a leading figure in the All-Indian National Congress, Abdurahman in 1924 established a consultative committee consisting of representatives from the APO, the Cape Indian Council and the ICU to lay the groundwork for closer cooperation'(Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, 135 - 136).

¹⁴⁰*Cape Times*, 12 July 1963.

¹⁴¹Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, 136.

On Abdurahman's return to Cape Town from India, he would doubtless have shared his experiences with his family. One of the most striking impressions of his visit was his strong identification as Indian; another, the power and dynamism of Sarojini Naidu. While Abdurahman was in India, he attended Naidu's inauguration as President of the All-India National Congress, the first woman to be elected to that position. She spoke *ex tempore* for more than an hour, although she gave 'Abdur Rahman', as he was known in the Indian press, a copy of the speech. The *Hindustan Times* reported, 'She kept the audience spell-bound.'

Dr Abdur [sic] Rahman ... in a short speech, said that Deputation was presenting to one of the greatest women of the world (Mrs Naidu) her photo. The South African Indians had given India the greatest living man (applause) 'Mahatma belongs to us. You will have to give us at least one of the two to go to Africa and fight our battle. If we take the greatest woman of India we are leaving behind her photograph ... We present this photo to our mother and aunt in token of the love of the South African Indians.'¹⁴²

While Dr Abdurahman was in India, his younger daughter was playing host to one member of an official Indian delegation which visited South Africa in 1926 in order to persuade the South African government to put aside segregatory legislation (the 'Asiatic Bills') until the two governments had discussed the position of South African Indians. Cissie's involvement is known through a letter which her father wrote to Sarojini Naidu after his return to South Africa. The delegate in question was Mr Bajhpai, who had a reputation for arrogance. Abdullah wrote:

Mr Bajhpai lived with Cissy [sic] and I am afraid she was not intellectual enough to impress him ... So the Indians will probably get a very depressing tale. What a pity.¹⁴³

In the same year, an official South African government delegation visited India. Sarojini Naidu was part of the welcoming committee. Further insight is provided into similarities between her and Cissie Gool. Neither would be dictated to. The *Cape Times* reported that:

Mahatma Gandhi had wished very much to meet the Deputation ... and had gone to Bombay for that purpose. The official programme was somewhat cut and dried and

¹⁴²*Hindustan Times*, 28 December 1925, in UCT M&A: BCZA 85/21, Abdurahman collection, reel 1.

¹⁴³UCT M&A: BCZA 85/21, draft of letter, 22 April 1926.

did not leave much time for private talks, but Mrs Naidu, who had officially been present in Bombay to meet the Deputation as president of the All-India National Congress, managed things in her own way.

The Deputation was to have been taken round Bombay Harbour in a steam launch on that afternoon, ... but instead of this Mrs Naidu invited the whole of the Deputation to her own room to tea to meet Mr Gandhi, and for over two hours the conversation went on in a very lively fashion.¹⁴⁴

Sarojini also held an 'At Home' for more than 100 guests during the Deputation's visit. Cissie similarly hosted 'At Homes' and likewise facilitated lively political and social interaction.

Cissie's husband was nominated by the Cape British Indian Council as a delegate to the Emergency Conference of the South African Indian Congress, which was called to prepare for the next Indian government delegation to visit South Africa, which would reach agreement with the South African government.¹⁴⁵ He was also involved in the reception committee which welcomed the Indian delegation.¹⁴⁶ At the conclusion of the Cape Town Agreement, the Cape British Indian Council organised a function for the Indian delegates. To be precise, Cissie Gool organised it, and provided musical entertainment.¹⁴⁷ Cissie was mentioned in the press only in her capacity as successful organiser, and was introduced to the reading public as 'the wife of Dr Gool'. The main guests 'were the members of the Indian Deputation, including Sir Muhammad Habibullah, the leader of the delegation' and others.¹⁴⁸ According to the *Cape Times*, Dr Abdurahman 'was one of those chiefly concerned with welcoming the guests and with the arrangements generally.'¹⁴⁹ Of course, he had the last word, and gave the farewell speech.¹⁵⁰ The following morning, Dr Gool, again representing the Cape British Indian Council, played the leading role in bidding farewell to the delegation at the train station.¹⁵¹ He was clearly considered a 'representative of the Cape Indian community,' and his wife played a supportive role.¹⁵² After this episode in South

¹⁴⁴*Cape Times*, 5 November 1926.

¹⁴⁵*Cape Argus*, 30 November 1926.

¹⁴⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷*Cape Argus*, 12 January 1927, 13 January 1927.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹*Cape Times*, 12 January 1927.

¹⁵⁰*Cape Argus*, 12 January 1927.

¹⁵¹*Cape Times*, 14 January 1927.

¹⁵²*Ibid.*

African Indian politics, it seems that A H Gool focused his energies more on his work as a medical doctor in District Six, where he replaced his father-in-law as 'the Doctor.'¹⁵³

Around this time, Cissie gave birth to her third child, Shaheen. His birth date has been impossible to verify through the official Birth Register, as it is closed for 100 years. On his registration form at the University of Cape Town years later, Shaheen indicated his birth date as 14 June 1926 on one occasion, and 1927 on another.¹⁵⁴ Rustum suggested that he was unplanned; presumably, children would tend to be born at regular intervals. Shaheen would be an introverted child, and is remembered as something of a loner.¹⁵⁵ Seven years younger than Rustum, he would not have fitted easily into his elder brother's circle of friends. His cousin, on the other hand, remembered him as a prankster with a lively sense of humour.¹⁵⁶ In 1927, Rosie graduated from Glasgow University with an MB,ChB.¹⁵⁷ She then returned to South Africa, and began working as a medical doctor.

The late 1920s saw fairly momentous shifts in Cissie Gool's life. Her friendship with Ruth Alexander and Ben Farrington broadened to include others at the University of Cape Town, as her parental family disintegrated, and Cissie and her husband agreed to separate. The date of their separation is difficult to pin down. Rustum remembered it as being in the late 1920s, while Everett locates it in 1936. There is no doubt that relations remained friendly between Cissie and Abdul. Nevertheless, at some stage she, Marcina and Shaheen moved out into a house in Exner Road, Vredehoek, beyond the boundaries of District Six. The close of the 1920s saw global recession, a radicalisation of politics in the western Cape, and a hardening of state policies towards black South Africans. In 1930, Cissie Gool would burst onto the political scene, and five years later would preside over a radical new organisation which directly challenged the APO. The following chapter explores some of the personal background to the radicalisation of Cissie Gool, while the final chapter looks at possible influences beyond the university and her family.

¹⁵³Dr Gool died in October 1973. See, for instance, *Cape Times*, 6 October 1973.

¹⁵⁴UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1945, 1168 and 1946, 1862 respectively. Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 4, has it as 1926 (she does not indicate day or month). Her source is the same as the inaccurate source for Rustum's birth, *Cape Times*, 13 December 1962. Rustum Gool thought that Shaheen was about seven years younger than him, which would make the correct year 1927, but he was not certain (E-mail to the author, 23 October 2001).

¹⁵⁵Rustum Gool, in telephonic conversation with the author, 24 March 2002.

¹⁵⁶Rassool, *District Six*, 6. Shaheen died under tragic circumstances in 1946.

¹⁵⁷UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1933, 965.

Chapter Five
Transitions
1928 - 1930

‘Women do not need to take fright at the word ‘politics.’¹

The late 1920s was a period of transition for Cissie Gool. Around this time, she and her youngest children left 48 Searle Street and moved to a house in Vredehoek. Around this time, too, Cissie’s father left her mother, and married a younger Muslim woman. The Abdurahman-Gool dynasty was disintegrating, politically as well as personally. In many families in District Six, political disagreements would split sons from fathers; a similar process took place within the Abdurahman family.² After Dr Abdurahman left Albert Lodge, Nellie Abdurahman and her daughters began to shift their political concerns to the left. The personal and the political were deeply intertwined, as Cissie, Rosie and Nellie all began to extricate themselves from allegiance to the APO and to Dr Abdurahman. Nellie Abdurahman may have led a quiet revolution, as she supported socialist politics and took up the challenge of campaigning for local government. Although she did not actually compete against Abdullah, she demonstrated to her daughter that it was appropriate for women of District Six to become involved in local government politics in an overt manner. Sarojini Naidu may well have encouraged Nellie in this regard, and Cissie would follow in her footsteps a decade later.

Cissie Gool, however, had yet to undergo a radicalisation of her political views. This chapter examines evidence that by this time she had not really begun to grapple with radical politics. There are only two shreds of evidence that provide insight into her political views at this time, but they are compelling. In 1926 she had modelled ‘Malay’ outfits for a White women’s magazine, and in 1928 she wrote an article on ‘the Malays’ for the *Cape Times Annual*, which did little to challenge stereotypes of exoticism. On the other hand, Cissie became increasingly involved with intellectual circles at the University of Cape Town,

¹Mrs E G Malan, stepmother of Dr D F Malan, cited in C Walker ‘The women’s suffrage movement: the politics of gender, race and class’ in C Walker (ed.) *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* David Philip Claremont 1990 p. 333.

²The best-known example is the van der Ross family. See University of Cape Town, Manuscripts and Archives (hereafter UCT M&A): BC 1004: Transcripts of Western Cape Oral History Project: District Six Interviews.

where she continued to study. The University of Cape Town records continue to provide a framework for much of this narrative, but there is practically no direct documentary evidence for Cissie's association with the UCT intellectuals. Oral sources pointed me in their direction, but very little material trace remains of Cissie's friendships with them. Given the information that Cissie was friendly with these circles, I have explored the circles themselves, which are mostly silent about Cissie herself, but which do demonstrate the heterodoxy of a group of her friends.

It is, therefore, fair to argue that Cissie Gool developed her political views partly in the company of people who were deeply committed to socialism, admired 'intelligent Marxists' but rejected rigidity of thought and loved discussing (frogs and) poetry.³ Cissie's association with Ruth Alexander and Ben Farrington expanded to include Lancelot Hogben and Frederick Bodmer in particular, and this chapter reflects on the heterodoxy of these influential friends. It also explores Cissie's continued study at the University of Cape Town, which suggests that at this stage of her life, she had not yet decided on a political career. For Cissie, the documentary and oral sources are muted for this period of her life, but tenuous links are highlighted to suggest possible influences on her life and development.

Some time after 1927 - perhaps as late as 1931 - Abdullah Abdurahman left his wife of more than thirty years, to marry a younger, Muslim woman. The timing has been impossible to verify, so it is impossible to construct anything resembling a causal narrative about the relationship between the break-up of the Abdurahman family and political developments.⁴ Estate records provide useful clues - those of Abdullah Abdurahman and of Nellie Abdurahman survive, but Cissie Gool's have been mislaid, and an invaluable resource has been lost.⁵ Assuming that Richard van der Ross is correct, and that the marriage was dissolved, circumstantial evidence suggests that this had occurred by 1931, as this was when Albert Lodge was transferred into Nellie's name. However, the house does not seem to have been a donation from her husband as a divorce settlement, as the transfer was 'by

³ See below, and A Hogben, ed. *Lancelot Hogben: Scientific humanist. An unauthorised autobiography*. Woodbridge: Merlin Press, 1998, 99. Hogben described Herbert Meyerowitz, whom he met through Ruth, and who was known as 'Volodja' thus: 'His political ideology was intelligently, not dogmatically, Marxist' (ibid).

⁴ Elizabeth Everett does not mention the break-up in her biography of Cissie Gool (E Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool 1897 - 1963: A biography. BA Hons diss., University of Cape Town, 1978.

purchase'.⁶ Although recollections differ as to whether Abdurahman divorced Nellie by Muslim rites, or simply took a second wife, it is universally remembered as traumatic.⁷ Nellie Abdurahman never worked for a living, but depended partly on the rental of various properties, and partly on Cissie's good will, for financial support.⁸ Whatever the niceties of the arrangement, Nellie's husband moved out of their home and went to live with his new wife. He never lived with Nellie again.

In losing Abdullah, Nellie also lost her status as his wife and public companion; this role fell to his new wife, a Muslim nurse, Margaret (Maggie) May Stansfield. With her Abdurahman had one daughter and, finally, two sons.⁹ Whereas previously Abdurahman's public appearances had been with Nellie in support, by the early 1930s the 'Mrs Abdurahman' referred to in the press was the second Mrs Abdurahman, and Nellie became 'Mrs N Abdurahman', always mentioned apart from the Doctor.¹⁰ (This did not stop her intense concern for educational matters, or her work within the community.) When Abdullah Abdurahman died, his will made no mention whatever of Nellie, Rosie or Cissie.¹¹ This suggests that he had indeed divorced Nellie and made some form of settlement with his first family at that time, as to leave them with no support would have been unconscionable for a devout Muslim, but there is no proof of this. Because it has been impossible to locate the precise date of the break-up, its effect on Cissie, or on Nellie herself, is difficult to decipher. It is unknown, for example, whether it was Dr Abdurahman's leaving Mount Street that prompted Nellie to take up the challenge to stand for the Cape Town City Council. On the other hand, if he had disagreed, it might have been the final straw which sent him packing. Or perhaps it had nothing whatever to do with their separation. What is certain is that

⁵Master of the Supreme Court, Cape Town. Cissie Gool's estate papers were removed in 1978, and never replaced. I was informed that they would probably have been mis-shelved, and that they were almost definitely permanently lost.

⁶Master of the Supreme Court, Cape Town (hereafter MOSC), 3349/53, Estate of Nellie Abdurahman. The evaluation of properties indicated that Albert Lodge, Mount Street, title deed 732/1898 was acquired by Nellie Abdurahman on 9 June 1931, by purchase (deed 4051/1931).

⁷Rustum remembered that A A had decided that he had a right, as a Muslim, to take a second wife (telephonic conversation); Richard van der Ross wrote that the marriage was 'dissolved' (R E van der Ross, *Say it out loud. The APO presidential Addresses and other major political speeches 1906-1940 of Dr Abdullah Abdurahman*. Bellville: Western Cape Institute for Historical Research, 1990, 4), and every person interviewed had a different opinion.

⁸MOSC 3349/53; Amina Gool, in conversation with the author. Her estate papers show that, when Nellie died in 1953, her house was in a state of advanced disrepair (MOSC 3349/53).

⁹Van der Ross, *Say it out loud*, 4.

¹⁰See, for instance, *Sun* 2 September 1932, 30 September 1932, 21 October 1932, 28 October 1932, 4 November 1932.

Nellie's choice would have impacted on her daughter's decision, years later, to follow the same path as *both* her parents.

In 1928, Nellie Abdurahman entered the fray of local government politics. She would have discussed this with Cissie.¹² Little is known of the history of women's struggle to gain access to local government in South Africa; Cherryl Walker's work focused on the national vote.¹³ Because the history of women's municipal vote in Cape Town differs substantially from that of men, it is necessary to outline the major legislative changes. Cissie's own career in the City Council, spanning from 1938 to 1963, was build on these foundations, as well as on those laid by her father as the first black man to serve on the Council.

Cape Town had a non-racial municipal franchise, until 1971 when the apartheid government finally stripped black men and women of the right to vote for, and serve on, the Council. Until then, the only qualification was financial. Despite the fact that first African and then Coloured men lost the right to vote at the national level, and that black women had never been able to (and could not before 1994), there was a modicum of power to be accessed in local government.¹⁴ The municipal vote had significant symbolic value. In the period covered by this thesis, this was the only institution where black women and men, as rate payers, could voice their demands and engage directly in politics. Cissie would be the first black woman to do so, but her mother, as a resident of District Six and former president of a Coloured organisation, showed her daughter the way. For women, it was never simply a question of race and class.

Whereas the history of black men and local government in the Cape is straightforward, the same cannot be said of women, whether white or black. There were two pathways to local power: entitlement to vote, and the right to stand on the council itself. Julia Solly had

¹¹Cape Archives: MOOC 67759, Estate papers of Abdullah Abdurahman.

¹²Nellie seems to have had some kind of falling-out with Rosie around this time. On 7 July 1927, Nellie wrote a will which excluded Rosie: 'I appoint my daughter Zainisa [sic] Gool, wife of Dr A H Gool to be my sole and universal heir of all my Estate and effects of whatsoever kind.' She later wrote a second will to include Rosie, dated 4 July 1952 (MOSC 3349/53).

¹³C Walker, 'The women's suffrage movement: The politics of gender, race and class', in C. Walker, ed. *Women and gender in southern Africa to 1945*, David Philip, Cape Town, 1990; C Walker, *The woman's suffrage movement in South Africa*, Communications No 2/ 1979, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1979.

declared that the Municipalities Act of 1882 'recognized women householders, or rather did not specify that "persons" must be male if they were to have the privilege of voting for councillors'.¹⁵ The history of women's right to vote in Cape Town differed from the rest of the Cape, as it was governed by particular legislation; it was more complicated than Solly's remark suggests.

Local government was first provided for by Ordinance 9 of 1836, which allowed for the establishment of municipalities.¹⁶ These would be formed by meetings of 'resident householders' who paid taxes of more than six shilling per annum. This ordinance provided that:

any person residing within the municipality and being the proprietor of a house situate within the same, and who shall pay annually a sum of not less than one pound sterling in taxes shall be eligible to be elected as commissioner.¹⁷

Qualification was irrespective of racial or gendered status. Similarly, in order to vote for the commissioners:

every person who is the occupier of any dwelling house either as proprietor or renter of the yearly value or rent of not less than ten pounds sterling shall be ... taken to be a resident householder ... every such householder shall have and be entitled to one vote and no more... no person shall be deemed competent to vote at any meeting ... to be held under the provisions of this ordinance who shall fail to produce (whenever required thereto by the chairman at any such meeting) proof of the payment of his or her taxes due.¹⁸

Women were specifically included in the term 'resident householder'. However, Cape Town was excluded from this ordinance, and the town was 'raised to the status of a municipality

¹⁴Coloured people were finally removed from the municipal voters' roll in 1971. See *Argus*, 23 October 1971: 'The Final Move. Loss of Municipal Franchise Imminent', which commemorates the role of Dr Abdurahman and Mrs Z Gool on the Council.

¹⁵J Solly, Franchise and the WCTU, *White Ribbon*, May - June 1911, 3.

¹⁶'Ordinance for the creation of Municipal Boards in the Towns and Villages of this Colony, on which the Local Regulations of each shall be found.' Ordinance 6 of 1936.

¹⁷Ordinance 9 of 1896, Section 13.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, Sections 48 and 49.

by a Special Ordinance (No. 1 of 1840).¹⁹ In terms of this ordinance, women lost the right to vote. Section 4 specified that:

every person who is the occupier of any house, warehouse, counting-house, shop of office, either as proprietor or renter, of the yearly value or rent of not less than ten pounds sterling shall be ... taken to be a resident householder within the meaning of this ordinance ... *Provided, always, that no female shall be deemed to be a resident householder within the meaning of this ordinance or to be competent to vote at any meeting or to be elected to any office.*²⁰

Under no circumstances were women to be given a voice or access to power in the Cape Town municipality. Thus, while Dr Abdurahman and the APO could laud the non-racial, liberal franchise of the nineteenth century, women were absolutely excluded.²¹

Act 1 of 1861, which repealed the earlier ordinances, specified again that only 'male' persons could qualify for the designation of householder, and specified that only such male persons could vote for, or serve, as commissioners on the municipal board. This stipulation was incorporated into Act 1 of 1867, which did not refer directly to sex, but did declare that in order to qualify to stand for election, or to vote, one had to be 'duly registered as a householder of the Municipality.'²²

1882 saw the passing of two Acts affecting the status of the municipal franchise. Cape Town was specifically dealt with in the Cape Town Municipality Act (44 of 1882). This act made no specific mention of sex, but opened the franchise to 'people'.²³ Moreover, '[e]very person registered as a ratepayer and qualified to vote ... shall be eligible to be elected a town councillor (Section 7).' However, women were given no chance to take advantage of this Act. The very next piece of legislation, The Municipal Act (45 of 1882), which included Cape Town in its ambit, and which, in fact, was assented to on the same day, corrected the

¹⁹Report of the Commission of Inquiry regarding Cape Coloured Population of the Union, para. 1036 (UG 54-1937). Dr Abdurahman was a Commissioner, and did a great deal of research into all aspects of Cape 'Coloured' history. It is notable that the Commission failed to notice the exclusion of women from Ordinance 1 of 1840 (see para 1037).

²⁰Ordinance 1 of 1840, Section 4 (emphasis added).

²¹This ordinance was repealed by Ordinance 14 of 1848, which did not alter the franchise qualification.

²²Section 6; see also Section 11.

²³Section 6 noted that: 'Every person who is the occupier, either as owner or tenant, or who is an owner though not an occupier, of any immovable property within the said Municipality, and whose name shall appear in the list of registered ratepayers ... shall be entitled and qualified to vote at all and any meetings of ratepayers called in virtue of any of the provisions of this Act.'

oversight. According to Section 15, the power to vote for the Council was restricted to 'male person[s] of full age'. And only voters could serve on the Council. Solly, therefore, seems to have celebrated prematurely. After Union, Ordinance 12 of 1910 indicated that women in the Cape could vote for municipal councils (Section 32), but only men could serve (Section 44). It was only in 1917 that this was amended to permit women to stand for municipal councils in the Cape.²⁴

Julia Solly took advantage of Ordinance 17 of 1917 to become the first woman to seek election to the Cape Town City Council, in September 1918. She had written of the need for women to use their municipal vote as early as 1911, but she saw that voting was insufficient: to make a difference to women's lives, one needed direct gender representation in government. However, she was unsuccessful. Her reputation as a pacifist, an unpopular stand to take in wartime Cape Town, may have cost her a seat on the Council; it certainly complicates any attempt at a gender analysis.²⁵ She stood against a wealthy and powerful male 'landed proprietor', William Hare. Hare gained 359 votes to Solly's 165.²⁶ She never stood again, and instead continued to work for the enfranchisement of White women, proving willing to jettison black women's rights.²⁷

It was not until 1923 that another woman stood for election to the Cape Town City Council, closely watched by Nellie Abdurahman. Miriam Walshe was the first woman to be elected to the Council, to be followed by Mrs Hetty Horwood, another registered nurse, in 1926.²⁸ Nellie kept press clippings and other documents concerning both women. As a member of the committee of the Women's Municipal Association, she was intimately involved with discussion around Mrs Walshe's election campaign.²⁹ Julia Solly was still concerned about the importance of getting women onto the Council, and corresponded with Nellie about the

²⁴Ordinance 17 of 1917, Cape Municipal (Amendment) Ordinance, Section 1, which amended section 44 of Ordinance 10 of 1912 by removing the word 'male'.

²⁵V Bickford-Smith, E van Heyningen and N Worden. *Cape Town in the twentieth century. An illustrated social history*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1998, 30, 55, 57, 58.

²⁶Cape Town, *Mayor's Minute*, 1929.

²⁷See Chapter Six.

²⁸No historical attention has been given to these women. In 1927, Mrs E F Groves stood for election to Ward 9 (Salt River). She received 271 votes to a Mr G W Watson's 803 (Cape Town, *Mayor's Minute*, 1928).

²⁹UCT: M&A: BCZA 83/30, notice of Women's Municipal Association: 'Meeting of Committee and Workers in connection with Mrs Walshe's Election'. See also Agenda for WMA committee meeting, 28 November 1922; WMA notice of Meeting to be held 12 December 1922; 21 August 1923, letter from Julia Solly to Nellie Abdurahman, 13 August 1923.

WMA.³⁰ Nellie kept a close watch on municipal politics, not only because her husband was a Councillor. She decided to enter the fray herself, two years after Hetty Horwood was elected.³¹ Hetty was nominated again by a meeting of the WMA; Nellie would serve in a different capacity.³²

There was an increasing desire among black Cape Town voters for 'direct representation' at the local level.³³ Black men had no alternative if they were to vote at national level, than to vote White for parliament; as for women in this period (black and White), local government provided the main opportunity for black people to gain access to a governing body. (The Provincial Council was limited to two representatives defined as not White.) The APO decided to 'nominate two Coloured men' to contest two seats in the September election for the City Council, for wards 6 and ward 7, both predominantly Coloured wards: 'these two wards are the only two in the City Council which can, if properly organised, return Coloured Candidates.'³⁴ At this stage it was assumed that the candidates would be men: 'direct representation' was held to mean representation by Coloured men. A meeting of ratepayers was called under the auspices of the APO to nominate candidates for the September municipal elections.³⁵

Despite the APO's determination to present Coloured candidates for these seats, it failed to find more than one man prepared to stand. 'Dr [AH] Gool declined nomination' - he was too busy. (His wife was not nominated.) The same reason was given by Abdul Gamiet; Mr C J Carelse 'could not allow his name to be placed before the meeting as a candidate', but Mr Reagon was happy to stand for either ward. Nellie Abdurahman was nominated, the first time that the ratepayers of District Six were called on to consider representation by a woman.³⁶ She faced criticism on two fronts - as a White person, and as a woman.

According to the *Cape Times*:

³⁰UCT: M&A: BCZA 83/30, Julia Solly to Nellie Abdurahman, Letter dated 13 August 1923.

³¹Nellie Abdurahman's membership of the WMA committee seems to have had no bearing on her candidature.

³²*Cape Times*, 28 July 1928.

³³See M Irvine, The municipal franchise and elections in Ward 7 (District Six), 1935 to 1944, paper presented to the Cape Town History Project Workshop, University of Cape Town, 11 - 12 November 1991, 7.

³⁴UCT: BC ZA 83/31: Abdurahman family papers, microfilm, reel 2: form letter, 27 June 1928.

³⁵Dr Abdurahman was not up for re-election at this time, so he was out of contention. Each ward was represented at any one time by three councillors. One retired each September and had to be re-elected.

³⁶*Cape Times*, 11 July 1928.

Mrs Abdurahman was nominated, but an objection was raised to her not being coloured. The Chairman stated that the notice he had received with regard to a previous meeting, which he had not been able to attend, mentioned 'coloured'.

Mr Reagon: And "men" (laughter).

After some further discussion, and after handsome tributes had been paid to Mrs Abdurahman for all she had done for the coloured people for the past 30 years, the meeting decided in favour of Mrs Abdurahman ... Mrs Abdurahman ... said that it was rather unfortunate that they had no coloured man prepared to stand for Ward 6.³⁷

Nellie Abdurahman responded to the objection to her not being 'coloured', underlining the fact that she lived in the community:

As a matter of fact I see no colour, but a man and a woman, and I hope that the time will come when we will all be one and when we will not have the word "colour" all the time... If there is a man and a woman capable of representing you in the Ward who live in the Ward, put them up, whether they are coloured or white. I trust that there will be men and women who will come along and represent you in a way of which you will be proud.³⁸

Nellie Abdurahman went on to outline her gender-specific contribution, as a woman and a mother - or perhaps a grandmother - taking care not to offend gender stereotypes which held that women's role was to rear children.

I should like to do something ... for housing and the establishment of a creche for the benefit of the poor children of the district.... I would like to see our district improved ... so that it would have beautiful roads and gardens, and open spaces for the children ... If I am elected, I shall try to do my best. I do not think a woman should stand if she has a family to bring up. My family, I can say, is brought up; and I can look after the young people of Cape Town and especially of the district in which I live. (Applause).³⁹

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Ibid. See also UCT M&A: BC 506, A1.3, Open letter to Ratepayers, 12 December 1928: 'To the Ratepayers of Ward 6 ...My record of service on public and Philanthropic bodies for the past 25 years is well known to the public.'

A later edition of the *Cape Times* reported: 'Nomination Refused by Mrs Abdurahman'. Nellie Abdurahman had apparently 'intimated that she was unable to stand for the Ward on this occasion, but hoped to be able to do so at some future date.'⁴⁰ No reasons were given, but this does suggest that someone had tried to dissuade her; if her husband was still living with her at the time, it is possible that he might have opposed her standing for the same job as himself, without discussing it with him first. However, in the event, Nellie Abdurahman decided to ignore whatever the voices of dissuasion, and ultimately stood as the ratepayers' candidate for Ward 6. There were three vacancies for this ward, and five candidates. She was the only woman, and she received the least votes. The APO candidate for Ward 7, Stephen Reagon, also failed to get elected.⁴¹ As far as the Coloured voters were concerned, race was clearly no stumbling block, as those elected were White, but the fact that Reagon also failed to get elected suggests that it was not simply a sexist vote.⁴²

Nellie Abdurahman had attempted to move from suffrage activism to local government. She believed that participation in local government would empower women to bring about the changes they also sought through demanding the parliamentary franchise, a campaign whose history is traced in Chapter Four. Nellie's younger daughter, perhaps, agreed; she would succeed where the older woman had failed.

However, Cissie Gool was not yet ready to seek access to the City Council. There was no discussion at the rate-payers' meetings of July 1928 of Cissie Gool as a possible nominee. Instead, the glimpse we have of her state of mind at this time derives from an article which she wrote on 'the Cape Malays', which appeared in the *Cape Times Annual*.⁴³ Two years previously, in 1926, Cissie had modelled for an article in the *South African Woman's Magazine*, a new magazine aimed at White, mostly English-speaking liberal women. The

⁴⁰*Cape Times*, 18 July 1928.

⁴¹The votes were as follows: J Frank - 859; S Goldstein - 850; S Bernstein - 841; A Ismail - 579; Nellie Abdurahman - 309 (Cape Town Mayor's Minute, 1929, 4).

⁴²Cape Town, *Mayor's Minute*, 1928, 1. The other predominantly Coloured ward, ward 7, has been analysed by Irvine, who suggests (by categorising names, a useful but not fail-proof strategy) that over 65 per cent of voters in the District Six ward in 1933-35 were Coloured. Nellie Abdurahman's close identification with 'Non-European' politics, her erstwhile marriage to a Coloured man and a Muslim at that - all of these may have militated against her acceptance by the white minority of Ward 6. On the other hand, another woman, this time a white woman carrying no black stigma, Mrs Groves, had stood for Council the previous year (but in a different ward), and had also failed to get elected.

⁴³*Cape Times Annual*, 1928.

magazine was in favour of women (which always meant White women) getting the franchise and Miriam Walshe and Hetty Horwood contributed regularly.⁴⁴

In the Christmas issue of the *South African Woman's Magazine*, the editor wrote:

Those upon whom the East, or anything appertaining to the East, exercises an irresistible fascination, will appreciate the articles and pictures of Malay life at the Cape.⁴⁵

Cissie Gool modelled 'Malay' attire for an article entitled 'Followers of Islam. A picturesque element of the population.' Mrs 'A H Gool' was thanked 'for kindly posing for the photographic illustrations.' Cissie illustrated the 'picturesque' quality of 'the Malay' people of Cape Town. Each photograph carried a caption from the writings of Mohammed, such as '[t]he world and all things in it are valuable, but the most valuable thing in the world is a virtuous woman', or 'Do not prevent your women from coming to the Mosque, but their homes are better for them.' The article ends:

Highly cultured in many cases, gentle, law-abiding, and keenly intelligent, the Malay people of the Cape are quite distinct from the 'coloured' people.

The article attempts to demonstrate that 'Malay' people are not frightening, and to give a balanced historical overview of the Muslim community in Cape Town. It succeeds, with Cissie's help, in representing Muslims as exotic, if beautiful, 'others'. And if the article did succeed in representing 'the Malays' in positive, if exotic, terms, the Christmas issue also features a 'graphic'⁴⁶ portrayal of Khalifa, 'that weird performance', where the stereotype of Muslims as fearful and foreign is underlined with repetition of 'wails', 'howls', 'moans', 'yells'; 'There was also the powerful smell of oiled bodies, inseparable from the Oriental'.⁴⁷

Cissie's article in the *Cape Times Annual* of 1928 reinforces these stereotypes of 'the Malay'.⁴⁸ The cover of the issue showed a colour illustration of a Cape Town mosque, with stereotypical 'oriental' man and woman. One of the goals of the *Annual* was to 'realise the diversity of South Africa', to 'impress the reader with a new understanding of the variety of

⁴⁴Miriam Walshe jokingly wrote that the proof that women were easily fooled was that they got married (*South African Woman's Magazine*, 1, 4, May 1936), but in the very next edition she had to compensate for this rash remark by writing an article on the joys of motherhood (ibid., 1, 5, June 1926).

⁴⁵*South African Woman's Magazine*, Christmas Number, 1926, editorial.

⁴⁶This was how the editor described it (ibid.).

⁴⁷W J Makin, The Khalifa, in ibid. Various newspapers reviewed this issue. See, for instance, the *Cape Argus*, 3 December 1926 and *Cape Times*, 4 December 1926.

South Africa, its scenery, its relaxation, its occupations, its races.'⁴⁹ Cissie's article was entitled 'The Cape Malays. A picturesque people by Zainunniswa [sic] Gool.' Although her name was mis-spelled, it is striking that the writer does not identify herself as 'Mrs A H Gool', but claims her own name. Illustrations have captions such as 'A typical Malay family of nearly half a century ago'. The article begins:

A visitor walking in the sunlit streets of Cape Town may catch a glimpse of an olive face of unusual loveliness, framed in soft drapings, with the delicate grace and glowing harmony of an Italian Madonna. Or he may chance upon a youth with the good looks and carriage of an Arab Sheik, wearing on his head a blood-red fez, the symbol of Islam.

A history of Cape Town's 'Malays' includes extensive quotations from Lady Duff Gordon's *Letters home*, which Cissie allows to stand without comment. Then she writes, '[f]oreign blood and Islam [sic] contact with white civilisation have combined to produce the delightful blend of the present-day Malays'. After describing different cultural traditions, she does, however, move away from racial stereotyping to note that:

[t]here is also an ugly side to the beautiful picture presented by the life of the Malays. Economic competition and colour bars are responsible for a large class of unemployed. Here we find poverty, ignorance and hooliganism, and many of the Malays have a reputation for being adept thieves when their pockets are empty and prospects are black.

However, the article ends on an up-beat note:

In spite of reverses and disabilities, faith in themselves and in Islam keeps them strong and happy, and they form still the most picturesque feature of the Cape.

This article underlines the difficulty in pin-pointing Cissie's political position, not to mention her position *vis a vis* Islam. She may have been assessing her status as a Muslim woman, but if so, she locates herself firmly outside the Muslim community, as an observer. This is despite the fact that she draws on material in a book edited by a writer known to Cissie and to her father, Dorothea Fairbridge, the above-cited collection of Lucy Duff Gordon's letters.⁵⁰ Cissie quotes from some of the letters about her own great-grandparents, but does not identify them as such. Instead, they become representative of a generic 'Malay'.

⁴⁸ *Cape Times Annual*, 1928. The quotations in the following two paragraphs are taken from this issue.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, editorial.

⁵⁰ L Duff Gordon, *Letters from the Cape*, ed. D Fairbridge. Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1921. See Chapter One.

Overall, the article represents 'the Malays' as exotic, and the 'Malay Quarter' as an island of Islam.

This article suggests that at this stage of her life, Cissie Gool was not yet ready to commit publicly to radical and controversial ideological and political positions. On the other hand, the article was written with a particular readership in mind, liberal White Capetonians. But Cissie did not challenge them in the way in which she would later challenge the myths by which people lived their lives. The 1928 *Cape Times Annual* article gives no hint of the Cissie Gool who would take to the political platforms of the 1930s - two short years later - demanding freedom for 'Non-Europeans'.

Nevertheless, in the late 1920s, Cissie became increasingly involved in leftist circles associated with Ruth Alexander, Ben Farrington, and other academics at the University of Cape Town. The evidence for this engagement is primarily oral, and consists of linking Cissie with particular intellectuals: Lancelot Hogben, Frederick Bodmer, and to a lesser extent, Louis Herrman. No information has been forthcoming about the precise character of Cissie's relationships with these men, although rumour links her romantically to Bodmer. It is suggested here that Cissie Gool's association with these circles would have influenced her tendency towards individualism, and the ease with which she later associated with left-wing activists across ideological divides. Lancelot Hogben and his associates refused to assume doctrinaire positions, and neither would Cissie.

Because the potential influence of Hogben and his circle on Cissie Gool's political development has not been recognised in the literature, this chapter devotes more attention to it than the somewhat tenuous links might seem to justify. As Christopher Saunders noted in 1988, at times the historiographical pendulum needs to be swung quite hard in one direction, to finally find a balance.⁵¹ None of the key secondary authors on Cape politics, Allison Drew, Gavin Lewis, R E van der Ross, Ian Goldin, or H J Simons and R E Simons mentions Hogben, Bodmer or Herrman.⁵² Elizabeth Everett interviewed Herrman, but does not

⁵¹C Saunders, *The writing of the South African past*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1988.

⁵²A Drew, *Discordant comrades. Identities and loyalties on the South African Left*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000; G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall: a history of South African 'Coloured' politics*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987; R E van der Ross, *The rise and decline of apartheid. A study of political movements among the Coloured people of South Africa, 1880-1985*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1986; I Goldin, *Making race. The*

introduce him personally into the text or explore his relationship with Cissie.⁵³ Hirson is a useful source of information about Hogben, but is almost silent on Cissie, and says very little about Bodmer or Herrman.⁵⁴

On 19 March 1929, Cissie Gool registered once more at the University of Cape Town.⁵⁵ It had changed in some ways since her previous attendance in the early 1920s. Always closely reflecting - and reflecting on - the society in which it existed, the UCT of the 1930s was an increasingly volatile environment from the point of view of black students. South African society was moving rapidly towards segregation and the removal of all political, civil and economic rights of Africans, in the context of world depression. Many White students at the University of Cape Town became increasingly racist in their attitude towards small but increasing numbers of black students, as did some White observers of the university's liberal policies.⁵⁶

Most Coloured students admitted to UCT in the early years registered for Arts or Education degrees. Given the high regard with which education was held in respectable Coloured society, it is not surprising that many students chose education. The low level of resources available for science teaching in black schools would militate against black students being able to follow scientific careers. More significant, however, was the impact of the government's 'civilised labour' policy, which was introduced in 1924 under the guise of the government's 'New Deal for Coloureds'. This promised the employment of Coloured people in preference to Africans, within a context of White supremacy. However, it was clear that from 1929 in particular, in the context of global recession, 'the government had begun to exclude Coloured labourers completely from its civilised labour policy.'⁵⁷ Skilled and unskilled work was increasingly monopolised by Whites. As far as university graduates

politics and economics of Coloured identity in South Africa. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1987; H J Simons and R E Simons, *Class and colour in South Africa 1850-1950*. London: International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, 1983.

⁵³E Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool 1897-1963. A biography. Honours diss., University of Cape Town, 1978.

⁵⁴B Hirson, *The Cape Town intellectuals: Ruth Schechter and her Circle, 1907 - 1934*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001.

⁵⁵The University of Cape Town (hereafter UCT) Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1929, 1448. On her registration form, Cissie indicated that her previous date of registration had been 1922. This suggests that she had not attended classes in 1923.

⁵⁶UCT Archives: F2/1: 'Non-Europeans'.

⁵⁷Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, 153. See *ibid.*, 119 ff for a discussion of the implementation and effects of this policy.

were concerned, the one profession in which Coloured people could find work (other than medicine if one could afford to study overseas) was education. As Lewis points out, '[t]he prominent role played by young Coloured teachers in the radical political movements which emerged in the 1930s no doubt at least partly reflected the frustrations [the policy] caused for skilled or educated Coloureds.'⁵⁸

Cissie did not study education, and she would have seen few black students on the campus, although precise figures are not available.⁵⁹ Of the handful of black students at the University in the mid-1920s, Howard Phillips has noted that:

Up to 1929 five had graduated, but it is clear that they kept very much to themselves, avoiding all potentially embarrassing social contact with fellow students. As one of the five put it years later, 'I never got stuck into their social activities because I was alone... I didn't want them to patronize me'.⁶⁰

One White, woman student who studied at the University in the 1930s remembers Cissie but it had never occurred to her as a young student to befriend her; she and most other White students kept apart from the very few black students on the campus.⁶¹

Any increase was in the context of small, if increasing, numbers of black matriculants eligible to enter tertiary institutions.⁶² Figures for black students in 1932 indicate that, in that year, one Indian and four Coloured students registered and one Indian and two Coloured students graduated. Insufficient information is provided to ascertain whether or not the latter were included in the former.⁶³ In 1933 four Coloured and nine Indian scholars passed the Joint Matriculation Board examinations, and fifteen Coloured scholars the Cape Senior

⁵⁸Ibid., 152.

⁵⁹In the late 1930s and 1940s, the Registrar received numerous requests for information about the University's black students, and statistics were compiled that provide a sense of the increasing numbers of black students. He was always quick to point out that the figures were based on guesswork - names and schools indicated on registration forms - as the university did not require students to indicate their racial classification (UCT Archives: F2/1: 'Non-Europeans').

⁶⁰H Phillips, *The University of Cape Town 1918-1948: The formative years*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1993, 192.

⁶¹Anonymous informant, in conversation with the author, 25 January, 2002.

⁶²Although this takes us beyond the period covered by this thesis, it is worth noting that there were only 40 Coloured and Indian students registered at the University in 1937. Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 192. Phillips points out that ten of these were medical students, who were still unable to complete the MB,ChB (ibid). One of these ten would have been Rustum Gool.

⁶³UCT Archives: F2/1 'Non-Europeans', 'University of Cape Town: Summary of non-Europeans attending the University'. The data covers the years 1932 - 1937, and was appended to a letter, W G R Murray to R F A Hoernle, 6 April 1937.

Certificate. Including African scholars, there were 76 matriculation passes in the country.⁶⁴ In that year, twelve Coloured students and eight Indian students registered at the University, including those who had registered previously. These figures were appended to a letter from the University of Cape Town to the University of the Witwatersrand in 1937, in reply to a request for information. The University of Cape Town's Registrar wrote:

the total number of non-European students registered in 1932-1937 has been 66 (including 7 females). The race distribution was: Coloured 46, Indian (mostly Malay) 19, Native 1 (a demonstrator [in African languages]). Of the 66 there are still at the University 27 Coloured and 13 Indian, viz: 15 BA; 7 B.Sc; 16 Medicine (1 Dentistry); 1 Engineering; 1 Speech Training.⁶⁵

Cissie did not have many black fellow students, let alone women, with whom to converse. She was one of the seven recorded here. Otherwise, an average of one black woman per year registered at the University of Cape Town. Most of Cissie's friends at the university over the next few years would of necessity be White, largely staff but also including a few students with whom she would develop friendships, some of which would endure to the end of her life. These relationships would impact significantly on the direction of her life, at every level. The most well-known of Cissie's close friends are Sam Kahn and Harry Snitcher, but other significant relationships developed in this period, before Sam took centre stage.

In 1929, Cissie seems to have set aside her dream of becoming a medical doctor, as she registered for a regular BA. On her registration form, she indicated that she had passed Ethics, English I, and the 'Medical' courses in Botany and Zoology. Now she planned to study English II and German I. Three other women attended both these classes: Lily Rabkin, Edith Herzfeld and Anna Grundlingh.⁶⁶ They would have become familiar, if not friendly, with Cissie, as the only women sharing these classes. I have not been able to link these women to Cissie in other contexts, unlike some of the men in her life. The impression is easily gained that Cissie's closest relationships were with men, but this is not necessarily so.

⁶⁴*Report of the Committee on medical training in South Africa* (UG 25-1939) 39, 40. By 1937, the total number of black matriculants had risen to 125 (*ibid.*, 40). The total number of Coloured scholars in secondary schools rose from 68 in 1919 to 348 in 1928 (UCT Archives: F2/1: 'Non-Europeans', 'Coloured Education in the Cape Province', hand-written draft, nd).

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

It could well be that the men concerned are simply more visible, many of whom entered the historical record in other guises as political leaders (such as Sam Kahn and Harry Snitcher), while the women have been lost. As noted earlier, the absence of a history of women at the University of Cape Town exacerbates this lacuna.

Frederick Bodmer, the 'intellectually brisk Swiss polyglot', had joined the German Department at the University of Cape Town in 1927.⁶⁷ He would be significant to Cissie for a brief period, although silence shrouds the relationship. Rustum Gool wrote:

I certainly remember Frederic Bodmer a Senior Lecturer in German attending [Cissie's parties] and several others. Bodmer was introduced to AA and he often visited the home at St James, learning to become an enthusiastic rock fisherman. What bliss he experienced landing a good catch of galjoen.⁶⁸

I have been unable to locate Bodmer's papers, there is no mention of him in the Abdurahman family collections, and while family members remember the relationship, they did not discuss the particulars. It has been rumoured that Bodmer and Cissie were intimate, but neither details nor confirmation have been forthcoming.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, two important points stand out about Cissie's relationship with Bodmer. Firstly, he provided a highly intelligent, internationalist perspective on the politics which informed Cissie's life, and secondly, linked to this, Bodmer drew her more deeply into the spreading network of intellectuals, based at the University of Cape Town but including the likes of Eddie Roux (a Communist and graduate of Cambridge), who would help to inform Cissie's personal-political development.

Bodmer, as he was known to his friends, was a Socialist, similar in some ways to his new friend Eddie Roux, a staunch member of the Communist Party of South Africa.⁷⁰ Eddie had

⁶⁶UCT Archives: Examination results, Box 3: 1929 and February 1930; University Examination results, BA 1929. All three women graduated with the BA degree in 1930 (UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 28 April 1931 (Examination Results, December 1930 appended)).

⁶⁷Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 20. The German Department had separated from French to become autonomous in 1923 (ibid., 19). Bodmer lectured in the German Department until 1939, shouldering the burden of Head of Department from 1937 (ibid., 267). He published under the name of Frederick, although his given name was Friedrich (ibid., 20). His friends, however, knew him as Bodmer (Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*; E and W Roux, *Rebel Pity: The life of Eddie Roux*. London: Rex Collins, 1970).

⁶⁸Rustum Gool, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2002.

⁶⁹A B, in conversation with the author, 19 December 1999.

⁷⁰I have found no evidence that Bodmer joined a political party while he was at the University of Cape Town. For similarities between Bodmer and Eddie, see, for example, Brian Bunting, *Moses Kotane: South African*

recently returned from Cambridge University, and was in Cape Town at this time. After he was fired by the Department of Agriculture, he launched the Party newspaper, *Umsebenzi*.⁷¹ Initially, Eddie was probably drawn to Bodmer partly because of a desire to learn German, but they quickly discovered much in common.⁷² Eddie admired Bodmer's bohemian approach to living, as well as his politics:

Frederick Bodmer was probably the one [of the University of Cape Town set] from whom I learnt most. He was ... a serious student of politics. An eccentricity for which he was famous was his liking for renting some large tumble-down house, of which there were a number in the suburbs of Cape Town, and there camping in one or two of the rooms. By nature indifferent to luxury and unwilling to burden himself with possessions beyond the bare necessities which included a bed and a frying pan, he led a life stripped of all trimmings, a life that was simple and even austere. It seemed to me a good life.⁷³

Eddie Roux often visited Bodmer, whose home was one of many bases for earnest, but pleasant, political debate. As Roux described it:

In his bedroom was a narrow divan bed, always placed in the centre of the room, a few cushions, two or three chairs, a table for his typewriter, perhaps a cupboard, nothing else. Here we gathered for endless talk and argument, to listen to our host and presently to eat cheese and grapes, drink cocoa or Moulin Rouge, a cheap natural wine of the Cape.

Bodmer was the ideal host, casual in his erudition, throwing off carelessly brilliant aphorisms in his oddly accented English.⁷⁴

A certain bohemian quality became associated with the circles in which Cissie moved, and one could not get more bohemian than Bodmer.⁷⁵ Whatever the precise quality of his relationship with Cissie, she was doubtless among those who gathered at Bodmer's house for cocoa or Moulin Rouge. Eddie and Cissie may have practised their German, in addition to more highbrow political discussions. Bodmer's eccentricities contrasted with Cissie and

revolutionary. Bellville, South Africa: Mayibuye Books, University of the Western Cape, 1998, 34, 40, 52 and 91.

⁷¹Ray Alexander Simons, unpublished autobiography, chapter 2.

⁷²Ibid. Eddie and Ray Alexander became friends because she needed to improve her English, and he wanted to improve his German - in addition to a shared ideology.

⁷³Roux, *Rebel Pity*, 77.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵R O Dudley, interviewed by Gairoonisa Paleker, videotape, Centre for Popular Memory, University of Cape Town, nd (c2001). He was not willing to provide details.

Dr Gool's highly respectable and relatively lavish residences (they had a bungalow at Clifton as well as 48 Searle Street) and famous Saturday night parties.⁷⁶

Another person who was friendly with Cissie, and who was also involved in these circles, was Louis Herrman. The only reason his friendship is known is that he shared his memories of Cissie with Everett, two years before he died. His papers are collected at the University of Cape Town, but they do not mention Cissie.⁷⁷ Herrman and Cissie were closer in age to lecturers than most students: in fact, Herrman was older than many professors at the University of Cape Town. Cissie had been older than most students when she attended the university in 1922. Now she was in her thirties, and even further removed from most students. Both were undeniably 'mature' students. Such students would tend to gravitate towards each other, and to relate more easily to staff, than to students, often young enough to be their children.⁷⁸ Louis Herrman graduated with an MA in Zoology in 1930.⁷⁹ He was not the only zoologist who would be significant in Cissie's life.

The Zoology Department was now the most dynamic department on campus, due to the appointment of Lancelot Hogben as Head of Department in 1927. Hogben, 'the zoologist and populariser of science and mathematics',⁸⁰ was 'just over 30'. He 'owed his appointment to his reputation as an outstanding biologist and to UCT's preference for selecting men under 35 as professors'.⁸¹ Hogben was known to have a 'tempestuous personality'.⁸² This, together with his socialist outlook, had militated against his acceptance at the university, but his intellectual brilliance had won over the selection committee.⁸³ He also had a reputation as an excellent teacher; H G Wells had engaged him to tutor his sons, for example, and the

⁷⁶It appears that Bodmer ended his life alone, and miserable, having watched his faculties desert him after what seems to have been a stroke. He wrote to Louis Herrman (see below) of his desperate loneliness (UCT M&A: BC 695, Louis Herrman collection).

⁷⁷UCT M&A: BC 695, Louis Herrman collection, information sheet. Everett was fortunate to be able to interview Herrman; he died two years later.

⁷⁸Some of these were indeed children of friends; one of Cissie's fellow students in the early 1930s was Ruth and Morris Alexander's son, Solomon Schechter-Alexander (UCT Archives: Student Registration Form, 1931; UCT Archives: Examiners' Reports, 1 December 1932).

⁷⁹UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 28 April 1931 (Examination results, December 1930 appended). Louis Herrman was born in Britain in 1883. See UCT M&A: BC 695, Louis Herrman collection.

⁸⁰Hirson, *The Cape Town intellectuals*, xvii.

⁸¹Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 12, 57. Hogben arrived in Cape Town shortly after his 31st birthday (Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*, 94).

⁸²Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 57.

⁸³*Ibid.*

University would benefit enormously from his inspirational teaching.⁸⁴ Hogben's lectures were immensely popular, and '[s]tudents - many of them not even registered for Zoology - flocked to hear his thought-provoking lectures.'⁸⁵ He was remembered by a student as 'the most stimulating man at UCT'.⁸⁶ As Phillips notes, '[i]n everything he did or said Hogben's ceaseless energy, original mind and sharp tongue and brain were in evidence.'⁸⁷ Despite a reputation for intolerance, Lancelot imagined naming his memoirs 'Looking back with laughter'.⁸⁸ He attracted like-minded intellectuals to the circle he and his wife Enid established.⁸⁹

Lancelot remembered Louis Herrman with fondness, as the writer of a 'scholarly book on the history of the Jews in South Africa' and a teacher who attended an evening class Hogben had set up and taught to equip local teachers to teach the newly compulsory school subject of biology.⁹⁰ Louis had been a student at the University of Cape Town in the early 1920s, and had probably met Cissie then.⁹¹ It is unrecorded whether Louis introduced Cissie to Lancelot, but he may well have done so. She had excelled in Zoology I in the days before Hogben had enlivened the department, and she could therefore converse on a zoological as well as a political, level. Under Hogben, who drew no line between students and staff, students were encouraged to socialise with the most brilliant intellects of the day - notably his. For the four years Hogben was at the University,⁹² he was central to a circle which, according to Hirson, 'dominated the intellectual life of Cape Town.'⁹³

Lancelot and Enid craved intellectual stimulation:

several among the junior academic staff were ... companionable, among them Benjamin Farrington, then a lecturer who taught Greek, and Frederick Bodmer, senior lecturer in

⁸⁴Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*, editor's note.

⁸⁵Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 58.

⁸⁶Cited in *Ibid.*

⁸⁷*Ibid.*

⁸⁸Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*, editor's note.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 98. There was an immediate connection between Louis and Lancelot, who wondered if 'the fact that his birthplace, like mine, was Portsmouth initially brought us so close together' (*ibid.*). They became close friends, and worked together for some years after Lancelot had left South Africa, sickened at the thought of bringing up children 'in a country where a white man kicks a black man off the pavement', and fearing repression as a result of his leadership of a radical student society, the Students' Rationalist Association (*ibid.*, 104).

⁹¹UCT Archives: Register of Students, 1922, folio 123.

⁹²Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 58.

⁹³Hirson, *Cape Town intellectuals*, xvii.

the department of German. Farrington awakened my interest in early Greek science and the Greek atomists to make me read anything accessible about them - including the doctoral thesis of Karl Marx. Bodmer whetted my appetite for the French encyclopaedists.⁹⁴

Lancelot's son later wrote that '[s]ociety owes perhaps its greatest debt to Lancelot for being one of the earliest and most eloquent opponents of Eugenics.'⁹⁵ Bodmer shared his view. In later years, Louis Herrman would criticise Bodmer's radicalism. Herrman, in his incarnation as a free-lance journalist, in 1937 wrote a letter to the *Times* about one of Bodmer's public lectures. BK Long, acting editor of the *Cape Times*, replied:

I was so glad to get your letter about Bodmer's address, having been tempted to write about it myself... your letter is much more judicial than anything I could have done by way of a leader, though you have let him off very lightly, I think. To say that English scientists have used eugenics as a class depressant is surely going too far.⁹⁶

Bodmer and Hogben's views on eugenics are but one example of the kinds of intellectual comradeship and discussion topics that Cissie would have relished.

Whether Herrman or Bodmer introduced Cissie to Hogben, what is clear is that a network was developing, and Cissie was a part of it. Ben Farrington, of course, was known to her through Ruth Alexander, who was also associated with the University of Cape Town.⁹⁷ Farrington shared with Hogben 'an independent and innovative turn of mind', but complemented Lancelot's tactlessness, by being 'always measured in his opinions'.⁹⁸ He was described as 'a man who is always listened to ... one of our best men.'⁹⁹ He probably introduced Lancelot to Ruth. Lancelot recalled that:

[n]early all my brightest students in Cape Town were Jewish, and the majority of my friends were. These included a rabbi, who was a Cambridge man and Professor of Hebrew in the University. Another was ... Ruth Alexander.¹⁰⁰

Hogben believed that Ruth hosted 'the only salon which attracted the Cape Town intelligentsia', presumably being unaware of the Abdurahmans' and Gools', and other,

⁹⁴Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*, 105.

⁹⁵He was recognised as one of the leading anti-eugenics scientists, along with JBS Haldane and Julian Huxley and the American Herbert S Jennings. See Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*, editor's note.

⁹⁶UCT M&A: BC 695, Louis Herrman collection, C1.11. Letter dated 25 June 1937.

⁹⁷Hirson, *Cape Town intellectuals*, 116.

⁹⁸Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 263.

⁹⁹Beattie, cited in *Ibid*.

'salons', or, as they might have referred to them, 'At Home's'.¹⁰¹ Lancelot recognised the importance of Ruth Alexander's salon as a venue for progressive intellectual debate. She 'was renowned as a personality whose voice could not be ignored and whose criticisms of South African racial legislation ... were incisive and demanded attention.'¹⁰² Hirson notes that Olive Schreiner, Mahatma Gandhi and Louis Herrman were friends of Ruth, but does not recognise that another of Ruth's close friends was Cissie.¹⁰³

As Eddie Roux recalled, the Gools' parties continued in this period, which does suggest that they had not yet parted.

Among those whom I came to know at this time were Cissie Gool and her husband Dr AH Gool... The Gools were now famous for their hospitality and for their delightful parties. Cissie was beautiful, eloquent, much interested in Non-European politics... The Gools kept open house at their bungalow at Clifton.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps the Gool parties did not provide Hogben with the kind of intellectual stimulation he craved, concerned as they were with 'culture' as much as with 'politics'. In fact, Hogben does not seem to have ever attended the Gool parties; he does not mention them in his memoir, and Rustum could not remember having seen him there, although he did know of the man.¹⁰⁵ In any case, soon after Lancelot and Enid arrived in Cape Town:

we reinstated our Edinburgh Saturday evening for social intercourse. With Cape brandy at eighteen pence a bottle, this cost next to nothing. We soon assembled a weekly salon of the Cape Town intelligentsia. The original nucleus was made up of my senior students and some of the non-professorial staff.¹⁰⁶

Because of her own Saturday night parties, Cissie would have been unable to attend the Hogben's salon regularly. Nevertheless, Cissie and her friends, among them Farrington, Bodmer and Hogben, came together at other times, at the university, at Bodmer's house, at

¹⁰⁰Ibid, 98.

¹⁰¹Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*, 99.

¹⁰²Hirson, *Cape Town intellectuals*, xvii - xviii.

¹⁰³Ibid, 57.

¹⁰⁴Roux, *Rebel pity*, 80, 83. Roux remembered this time with great fondness. He wrote: 'My memories are of sunshine on the mountain, of Belinda [as Winifred was known] reading to us ... of talk with Hogben, of the babel at the Gools' (Ibid., 83.) Whereas Hirson claims that the Gool 'salon' replaced Ruth's only after the latter had left South Africa, they clearly existed alongside one another (Hirson, *Cape Town intellectuals*, 170).

¹⁰⁵Rustum Gool, E-mail to the author, 19 March 2002.

¹⁰⁶Roux, *Rebel pity*, 105.

the Union Tennis Club, which Cissie had established in the 1920s.¹⁰⁷ It was not necessary to keep Saturday night free to be part of the network.

Hogben's students included Ruth's son Solomon, who excelled in Zoology,¹⁰⁸ as well as older students like Louis Herrman.¹⁰⁹ Another significant academic from Cissie's perspective was Alexander Zoond, a former student of Lancelot's from McGill University, who joined the Zoology Department a year or so after Lancelot (at the latter's instigation).¹¹⁰ Zoond would become friendly with Rosie, whom Cissie may have introduced to the circle.¹¹¹

Eddie Roux remembered:

though most of the Hogben set were biologists, a love of poetry was very much in evidence. Here was Zoond and Zwarenstein, young lecturers at the university. Zoond, darkly handsome, was a pugnacious atheist. He would recite Rupert Brooke's poem of the cosmology of fish and end with dramatic quietness: 'There shall be no more land, say fish.'

Zwarenstein had a passion for the mountain and would lead small parties on Sunday climbs. We would carry with us lunch supplies of meat which we grilled over a fire, coffee and a bottle of Moulin Rouge. Zwarenstein always brought a book of poetry.¹¹²

Zwarenstein would later attain notoriety for a radical speech about 'Sex and society' for the Students' Rationalist Association, which cost him dearly in years of denied promotion.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Amina Gool remembers meeting Ben Farrington at the Union Tennis Club. As a Muslim, she did not approve of the wine glasses she observed (in conversation with the author, 14 August 2001).

¹⁰⁸ UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 28 April 1931, Examination Results 1930. He was awarded the class medal for Zoology I.

¹⁰⁹ The close friendship between Lancelot and Louis continued until Lance's death. See UCT M&A: BC 695, Louis Herrman collection. I was unable to examine Hogben's papers at the University of Birmingham. My comments about his not mentioning Cissie are based solely on letters of his in Herrman's collection and the unauthorised autobiography edited by Hogben's children. In addition to correspondence, a print of a portrait of 'Lance' is to be found in the Herrman archive. Although it is not signed or dated, it is in the style of Gregoire Boonzaaier. Herrman was invited by Hogben, and served as his research assistant at the London School of Economics for 1931-33. Lancelot tried to persuade Herrman to stay, but the latter's passion for teaching won the day, and he returned to Cape Town (Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*, 98, 104).

¹¹⁰ Ibid, 97.

¹¹¹ See below.

¹¹² Roux, *Rebel pity*, 78 - 79. Harry Zwarenstein had joined the University of Cape Town Science Faculty in 1926. He was one of a number of staff who were registered for higher degrees; he graduated with a PhD in 1931.

¹¹³ Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 201, 326 - 7.

Zoond, on the other hand, gained notoriety of a slightly different kind, also associated with sex, when he invited Rosie Abdurahman to a social at the University. Lancelot remembered this evening, which was fictionalised in Ruth Alexander's unpublished novel, *The Exiles*.¹¹⁴ It is the only incident mentioned by Hogben and Hirson that in a roundabout way points to Cissie's association with this circle. As Lancelot remembered it:

In the ordinary sense of the term, neither Enid nor I was ... politically active... but the relation between white and non-white intruded on every aspect of existence, not least within the university ... The lecturer whom I imported from McGill to replace the relict of my predecessor formed an attachment to one of the only two coloured medical graduates then practising in the [country], the other being her brother-in-law, a leading light in the Moslem community.¹¹⁵

Hogben, of course, was referring to Rosie, and to Dr AH Gool. Lancelot was apparently unaware that Abdullah Abdurahman was also practising medicine at the time, although by this time he had given up most of his medical work due to the pressures of his political career. Rosie was not studying at the University at the time that she 'formed an attachment' to Alexander Zoond, whom most likely she met through Cissie. Hogben continued:

When our young colleague confided in us that he was bringing his lady-friend to the University's annual dance, both Enid and I scented embarrassment for both.

Accordingly, we asked the pair to dine with us so that the lady could come as our own guest. My Jewish students clustered round and saw to it that she was never without a partner. The next day, the more rabid nationalist students held an open air campus meeting of protest. In the course of it, one fanatical Afrikaner asserted that I had brought to the hall a native prostitute after leaving it in a state of intoxication.¹¹⁶

Lancelot approached Ruth Alexander's husband Morris, 'the leading civil rights lawyer', for advice, and managed to get a formal apology out of the Students' Representative Council, the text of which Hogben wrote himself.¹¹⁷ Lancelot seems not to have remembered Cissie as being at the dance. According to Hirson, however, who had access to Hogben's papers (but does not indicate whether he took the story from the papers or from the *Autobiography*):

¹¹⁴Hirson, *Cape Town intellectuals*, 166.

¹¹⁵Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*, 113.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 113 - 114.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

According to Hogben, Alexander Zoond, a young Canadian lecturer in his department, fell in love with a well-known coloured woman and invited her and her cousin to the University's annual dance. Informed of this intended contravention of campus custom, and aware of the possible reactions, Hogben and his wife took the group to the dance under their wing.¹¹⁸

Perhaps Hirson misread Hogben, and Cissie was not actually present, because he states:

According to Hogben, the women were doctors, both Glasgow graduates, but it is more likely that they were Dr Aswardah [sic] Abdurhaman [sic] and Cissie Gool (much renowned for her beauty), daughters of the prominent political figure Dr Abdurhaman [sic].¹¹⁹

Hirson seems to have mistaken A H Gool for Cissie in Hogben's story. The 'cousin' is, presumably, the 'brother-in-law' of Hogben's memoir. Nevertheless, the important link is confirmed between Rosie and therefore Cissie, and Zoond, and therefore Hogben and his circle.

Sex, not unlike religion, is not a topic of serious analysis in South African political history of this period, despite the fact that it was an integral part of the lived experience and political process of the South African left, both in terms of debates around miscegenation and in terms of relationships between activists. In the South African context of the late 1920s, in the wake of the Immorality Act of 1927, sex was highly politicised.¹²⁰ Lancelot Hogben was surprised at the extent to which sex dominated political discourse during his stay in Cape Town. Rather than exploring the racial dimension, he understood it in terms of conflicts within Jewish families and communities, from which many young White, male, university-educated radicals - and the best of his students - emerged. Lancelot wrote:

In orthodox families which almost invariably saw to it that one of the boys had a university education leading to a learned profession, there was no such provision for the higher education of the girls. It thus could, and often did, happen that the young Cape

¹¹⁸Hirson, *Cape Town intellectuals*, 167.

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰A number of local and international writers have noted the complex ways in which the tensions between sexuality, race and gender are politicised. As Ferber notes of America, White supremacist 'obsession with interracial sexuality is part of the process of boundary maintenance essential to the construction of race and gender identity' (A Ferber, *White man falling: Race, gender and White supremacy* Lanham: Rowman &

Town Jewish intellectual formed attachments with women students having cultural interests they were not likely to share with the marital partner of their parents' choice. The fact that such liaisons inevitably terminated without either church bells or a visit to a registry office inevitably invited resentment, it also accounted for an immense pre-occupation with sex as a topic of polite conversation.¹²¹

Young male, White, Jewish, radical intellectuals like Harry Snitcher and Sam Kahn were among those whom Hogben knew as law students at the University, through their common interest in the Students' Rationalist Association which Hogben helped to found, and which, like the Students' Political Society, radicalised student politics.¹²² Sam and Harry would both become close friends of Cissie, a married, Coloured, older, Muslim woman. Their relationships were profoundly political, whether sex was involved or not.

Hogben did not consider the impact of sex on Jewish women, seeming to assume that the few Jewish women who were at the university would associate with the brilliant Jewish male students. However, Jewish women were active in the political movement, and sex was an issue for them too, as it was for gentile women.¹²³ Hogben did not discuss sex across the colour bar either. In the South African context, sex was increasingly an overtly political act, particularly if it entailed crossing the 'colour line'. The Immorality Act of 1927 outlawed sexual relations out of marriage between Whites and Africans; it was clearly just the beginning of an attempt to prevent 'inter-racial' sexual relationships. This was an issue for Cissie as for everyone else within the movement, and her friendships with White men raised

Littlefield, 1999, 6). For a local perspective, see G Retief, 'Keeping sodom out of the laager' in M Gevisser and E Cameron (eds) *Defiant Desire*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1994, 100.

¹²¹He continued: 'I believe HG Wells went to the root of the matter when he said that Freud's obsession with the relevance of sexuality to neurosis was the by-product of a wealthy Jewish clientele not yet fully assimilated to the way of life of its Viennese neighbours.' (Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*, 108.)

¹²²Ibid., 112 ff. See also UCT M&A: BC 1161, Harry Snitcher collection, transcripts of tapes for a biography of Snitcher. Hogben is incorrectly transcribed as Hobday. Despite the fact that Snitcher's friendship with Cissie Gool is common knowledge, there is no mention of her in the collection.

¹²³For example, Ruth and Ray Alexander had to confront the issue of sex within the left. Ray Alexander, leading Communist and trade union organiser in the Western Cape in the 1930s and friend of Cissie, challenged the sexual politics that informed power relationships between shop steward and worker on the factory floor, or within the executive of the Party itself. Alexander rejected the assumption that certain men in positions of power or leadership had the right to sex with young women. Men like Lazar Bach, who together with Douglas and Mary Wolton purged the local Communist Party in 1931, had assumed such rights, only to be publicly reprimanded (but not, it seems, shamed) at Ray's insistence. For Alexander, it seems, Bach's sexual politics underlined his political unreliability. (Ray Alexander, unpublished autobiography.) Alexander had known Bach as a student in Latvia, where he had proved politically unreliable. She neither revealed this to the comrades in South Africa, nor forgot it. The price that Ruth had to pay for sex across the religious line has been discussed; importantly, it was she, not Ben, who suffered the consequences.

what she later described in a lecture as 'the Bogey of Miscegenation.'¹²⁴ Cissie Gool's relationship with the younger, White, Jewish, Sam Kahn, was considered scandalous, from multiple perspectives: colour, religion, age. And whereas marriage was not yet outlawed between people of different colours, an informal Colour Bar operated at the most intimate of levels, rendering Cissie's parents' marriage (which was never legal in the first place) increasingly fragile and vulnerable,¹²⁵ and making it difficult for her to marry the man of her choice.¹²⁶

The absence of sex within the historical-political discourse is, of course, a marker of the exclusion from 'the political' of the personal. However, sex was there, informing political relationships; references to the 'bohemian' nature of the Capetonian Left, and Cissie's friends in particular, support this.¹²⁷ Whereas sex is given no shrift in academic political biographies, it is permitted to enter the genre of memoir. There the androcentric nature of leftist men in the 1930s is apparent. Only in his memoirs, for instance, Eddie Roux admitted, in amusement, to his engagement in sexual relationships.¹²⁸ He would not have been censured for his behaviour. Amy Thornton recalled of a slightly later period that sexual freedom was associated with the striving for political freedom on the left, and Selim Gool recalled of his father, Unity Movement leader Goolam Gool, that he 'chased skirt'.¹²⁹ This kind of appellation suggests that this behaviour is not to be taken seriously. But such attitudes and behaviour among men of the left cannot be sidelined as a joke: it crucially affected the political process. For those women who participated in sexual liaisons out of marriage or custom, the price was high: Cissie had to live with scandal, Ruth had to leave the country. Throughout her life, Cissie tried to smash this insulting attitude towards sex,

¹²⁴This lecture was given in 1937, as reported in the National Liberation League's short-lived newspaper, the *Liberator*, 1,3 May 1937. The lecture was part of a programme of 'free Political Education', held on 19 Sept 1937. Jimmy La Guma gave a lecture on 'Our women and the liberatory movement' on 12 Sept 1937.

¹²⁵Not surprisingly, Nellie collected press clippings on the Immorality Acts. See UCT M&A: BCZA 83/32, Abdurahman family collection, reel 3.

¹²⁶Marriage between Whites and other racially classified people was prohibited under the National Party government in 1949. Cissie's husband would be prevented from marrying his long-time companion; later, their daughter would have to leave the country in order to save her marriage to a White, Jewish man.

¹²⁷R O Dudley interviewed on videotape by G Paleker, Centre for Popular Memory, University of Cape Town c2001.

¹²⁸Roux, *Rebel Pity*, 83. Through Hogben's circle, Eddie Roux met Winifred Lunt, 'a lively girl from England, a mathematics teacher then taking a sabbatical year studying education at the University. I was later to marry her.' Roux, *Rebel pity*, 75. See also UCT Council Minutes, 28 April 1931: Examination Results 1930: Winifred was runner-up for the class prize in Psychology I.

¹²⁹Amy Thornton, in conversation, 10 April, 2000; S Gool, Building blocks in my life, draft manuscript, African Studies Library, University of Cape Town, Sept 2001.

and her parentage, wherever she encountered it. Advocates of exclusively black unity who criticised her associations with 'Whites' as politically incorrect did not appreciate the significance of Cissie's path of symbolic direct action against the colour bar. Friendships, whether intimate or not, with White people were one in the eye to the colour bar.

Cissie's relationships with the University of Cape Town intellectuals were not insignificant to her political development as an independent actor on the political stage. Lancelot Hogben had succeeded in stimulating political debate, among more wide-ranging discussions.¹³⁰

Louis was a scientist, a teacher, a free-lance journalist and writer. Bodmer discussed semantics with as much passion as he discussed politics. Farrington was a classicist, publishing regularly, and the leader of the Irish Republican Association of South Africa (he later joined the Communist Party of Great Britain); Lancelot and Enid both researched and wrote passionately in their discipline. Hogben and a number of his colleagues were linked through their fascination with a frog, *Xenopus*, after which Lancelot and Enid named their home in Cape Town.¹³¹ Zwarenstein was one scientist who studied this frog, and no doubt *Xenopus* threatened from time to time to dominate the conversation.¹³² This ability to combine frog-talk, poetry and semantics with political discussions of frog-marching was characteristic of the Hogben set, whereas it might have been considered too frivolous in other more seriously leftist circles. Here Cissie, too, in addition to a love of and flair for poetry, could converse enthusiastically about matters zoological: it was the only university course for which she achieved a distinction.

Lancelot and Cissie had similar 'tempestuous' personalities and lived their lives with passion. Neither was afraid to speak her or his mind, and their discussions would have been electric. When Phillips describes Lancelot, he could almost be referring to Cissie:

Whether he was ... lambasting unscientific public attitudes, policies and actions in the press or from public platforms, or challenging the racial order in South Africa by word or deed, this little wisp of a man was, in the words of his Royal Society obituary, "a

¹³⁰Roux, *Rebel pity*, 75.

¹³¹Hogben, *Unauthorised autobiography*; Roux, *Rebel pity*, 75.

¹³²In 1930, for example, Alexander Zoond (in addition to publishing jointly on a different topic with Enid) published a paper on 'The mechanism of equilibration in *Xenopus Laevis*' and another entitled 'Dermal photoreceptivity in *Xenopus Laevis*', and Zwarenstein published 'The effect of temperature on the carbohydrate tolerance in *Xenopus Laevis*' (UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 28 April 1931, Senate Report for 1930). Two other members of staff also published on *Xenopus* that year.

tremendous rocker of other people's boats", a person quite "incapable of concealing disapproval or personal dislike."¹³³

Cissie Gool's later political perspective would in many ways reflect Lancelot's: she did not 'make a good communist' or 'a good' politico of any particular persuasion because, like Lancelot, she was fiercely individualistic, and delighted in polemics. In the 1920s Sarojini Naidu had provided a role model of one kind: in the thirties Lancelot Hogben and others of his mould provided another. The power and enthusiasm of each was inspiring. Even the ideological persuasiveness of Cissie's later friends in the CPSA, including Sam Kahn and Harry Snitcher or Ray Alexander, could not force her ever to be anything other than herself. Her ideological position might have been 'unreliable', but she could always be depended on to be herself.

Lancelot Hogben resigned in 1930, to take up a chair at the London School of Economics. Hogben's influence on Cissie Gool had been significant, and before he left the following year, he saw her take to the public platforms of anti-racist politics with the same kind of passion as he had exhibited through his short sojourn at UCT. Shortly after Cissie re-registered at UCT, she stood on her first public political platform, calling for the enfranchisement of 'non-European' women.

¹³³Phillips, *University of Cape Town*, 58.

Chapter Six
The radicalisation of Cissie Gool?
1930 - 1935

Though [a life] has its own time, its own inner dimension and volume, when it emerges and takes shape it does so against the pressure, resistance and influence of a surrounding history and ethos.¹

Cissie Gool's radicalisation is difficult to trace in concrete terms. She stood on public political platforms in 1930 and 1931, calling for the enfranchisement of black women, but did not embark on full-time activism until the end of 1935. In the meantime, she considered different possible career directions, while becoming increasingly drawn into circles on either side of the so-called 'Trotskyist' - 'Communist' divide, associated with her husband's family on the one hand, and friendships emanating from the University of Cape Town and the Communist Party on the other. This chapter explores some of the roots of Cissie's radicalisation, from the perspective of the different circles in which she moved in this period. As her ties with her husband weakened into the 1930s, so she turned increasingly to more radical circles, although in the early years she accompanied him to various political meetings.²

Cissie's personal radicalisation must be seen within the context of the radicalisation of Capetonian politics in the 1930s, in the wake of the demise of the government's 'New Deal for Coloureds' and the rank failure of moderate black politics, whether in support of, or in opposition to, National Party policies.³ The failure of the Non-European conferences, under the leadership of Dr Abdurahman from 1927 into the early 1930s, to admit confrontational tactics into their repertoire, and to achieve anything concrete through their protests and deputations, underlined the bankruptcy of this approach for the new generation of the

¹S Clingman, *Bram Fischer: Afrikaner revolutionary*. Cape Town: David Philip and Mayibuye Books, University of the Western Cape: 1998, 1.

²Yousuf Rassool remembered the marriage having broken down in 'the early thirties' (Y S Rassool, *District Six - Lest we forget. Recapturing subjugated cultural histories of Cape Town (1897-1956)*. Bellville: University of the Western Cape, 2000, 6).

³G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall: a history of South African 'Coloured' politics*. Cape Town: David Philip, 1987, chapter 5.

Capetonian black elite, children of the older leaders. At the same time, the African National Congress had been radicalised in the western Cape in the late 1920s, when Elliot Tonjeni and Bransby Ndobe led a militant branch in the village of Worcester. Their story is at the heart of the radicalisation of black politics in the region, and people close to Cissie were involved in the famous rescue of these leaders from probable lynching.⁴ Johnny Gomas was involved in this work, and, after the government's deportation of Ndobe and Tonjeni, he and other militant western Cape ANC leaders kept the radical spirit alive. Johnny Gomas became friendly with Cissie Gool in the early 1930s, and he was to be a significant influence on Cissie's political development. At the same time, the doctrinaire rhetoric of Gomas and others was tempered by Cissie's involvement with the more eclectic intellectual circles associated with the University of Cape Town, as discussed in the previous chapter. This set her apart from the younger generation of radical Capetonian leaders who would form the core of the Unity Movement in the 1940s. This chapter explores various strands in the radicalisation of Cissie Gool, beginning with her public speeches in 1930 and 1931.

In 1930, Cissie Gool joined her parents in protesting against new legislation, including the enfranchisement of White women. Although women had been enfranchised at municipal level in the Cape on the same basis as men, before 1930 all women were still excluded from the national franchise. Nellie Abdurahman had been involved with the women's suffrage movement since her arrival in South Africa. She was never a leader with a high profile, however, and it has proved impossible to discover the precise nature of her participation. After Olive Schreiner's resignation in protest against racism in the Women's Enfranchisement League, Nellie remained associated with the WEL, and was willing to stand on its platform, where the enfranchisement of all women was demanded.⁵

According to its submission to a Select Committee of Inquiry into the Enfranchisement of Women in 1926, the WEL's call for female enfranchisement on the same basis as men was

⁴Eddie Roux seems to have organised the rescue, and Ray Alexander and Lancelot Hogben both seem to have been involved, Lancelot supplying the car, and Enid driving it. Ray Alexander remembered that she had been at a party, and Eddie had asked her to find someone with a car. She does not name the 'doctor', but it seems likely that this was Hogben. See Ray Alexander, Unpublished autobiography, in the author's possession, and Hogben, A, ed. *Lancelot Hogben: Scientific humanist. An unauthorised autobiography*. Woodbridge: Merlin Press, 1998, 114 - 115. See Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*, 106 ff.

⁵R First and A Scott, *Olive Schreiner: A biography*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1980.

an ideal the League was willing to discard if it meant White women getting the vote. As Lady Rose-Innes explained:

Of course a half-loaf is better than no bread, but it surely would be extremely foolish of us not to ask for the whole loaf. There must be some idealism about our work... we will accept what we can get... We know in our hearts we shall not get all that we ask, but we are very anxious for the half-loaf.⁶

Julia Solly, by now a widow, made her case extremely clearly. She found it humiliating that White *bywoners*, foremen and a Coloured driver had the vote while she did not.⁷ Nellie Abdurahman was in the unenviable position of supporting the call for the enfranchisement of women (even if on the same basis as men, it seems), yet in so doing associating with women who, when put to the test, admitted that such a call was idealistic and that they were willing to jettison black women's rights.

South African suffragists were not typical of their counterparts in other colonies who demanded the vote. In India, for example, colonial women's role was encapsulated by the term 'imperial maternalism'. As Clare Midgley explains, drawing on J Bush:

Women's propaganda stressed the impulse of "imperious maternity"... Marriage and motherhood were brought to the heart of the imperial enterprise, providing women with an imperial role which was complementary, rather than subordinate, to men. Victorian domestic ideology was tied to imperial ideology Women would ensure the permanence of British imperial control by domesticating - settling and civilizing - their husbands, by producing the new white generation and rearing them to be loyal British subjects, and by *exercising maternal care and control over the 'natives'*.⁸

In South Africa, White women suffragists, many born in Britain, displayed no sense of a maternal duty. Race interests ensured that women would not be able to unite in any significant sense, despite certain appearances: the WCTU had, for example, a 'native' and a Coloured branch. Crucially, segregation was deeply embedded in the WCTU's organising

⁶SC 12-1926: Select Committee on the Enfranchisement of Women: Minutes of Evidence, 17.

⁷Ibid., 26. The Committee reported that there was no clear demand from the suffragists for the franchise for Non-European women.

⁸C Midgley, Ethnicity, 'race' and empire in June Purvis, ed. *Women's history. Britain, 1850-1945. An introduction*. London: UCL Press, 1995, 264, italics added.

principle, but when it came to the crunch, White, middle class suffragists did not hesitate to sell all other women down the river.⁹ This placed Nellie in an invidious position.

Cherryl Walker argues that from 1924 it was simply a matter of time before women got the vote. The main stumbling block in parliament was the position of Coloured women in this process, because some Coloured - and even a few African - women had access to sufficient wealth and education to qualify for the Cape franchise.¹⁰ In 1925, after Hertzog came to power:

[he] repeated ... that while Africans should be politically segregated, the Coloureds with their higher 'level of civilisation', should not ... However, he insisted that the 'coloured question' was inseparable from the 'native question' - as there was no categorical definition of the former - and so the extension of Coloured franchise rights could only come after the Africans had been politically separated.¹¹

This argument was also used in the delay in granting women franchise rights.

In the 1927/1928 parliamentary session, a non-racial suffrage Bill was introduced into the House of Assembly. One of the speakers pointed out that Women's Enfranchisement had been attacked from both sides: some members of the House of Assembly refused to vote for a Bill which enfranchised White women only, while others refused to vote for one that did not. Thus in either case, women had lost out.¹² As Walker points out, '[f]or the first time a suffrage Bill went right through to the Committee Stage where, by 56 votes to 42, it was amended ... to apply to white women only.'¹³ The politics of women's suffrage reflected and fed into wider race and class issues within South African politics. White women had to wait for the vote because of 'the native question': White male parliamentarians wanted to ensure that when women got the vote, it would only be White women, because 'the native question' would have been solved - ie racist segregation at all levels of society, including politics,

⁹SC 12-26: *Select Committee on the Enfranchisement of women*, 1: Evidence of Emilie Jane Solomon, Vice-President of the WCTU.

¹⁰C Walker, *The woman's suffrage movement in South Africa*. Communications 2/1979. Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1979, 43 ff.

¹¹Ibid., 136. The political segregation of Africans was linked to the government's 'civilised labour policy', which privileged 'civilised' labour - ie white labour. Abdurahman tried to persuade the government to de-racialise the concept of civilised - as Hertzog was apparently willing to do. However, the enfranchisement of white women demonstrated that the government was not concerned with privileging Coloured men or women - either politically or economically.

¹²SA government. *House of Assembly Debates*, vol 10, 1927/1928.

¹³Walker, *The women's suffrage movement*, 50.

would be in place. Hertzog deliberately wrecked the bill for women's enfranchisement, promising that if he were elected in the next general election, he would ensure that women were enfranchised thereafter. He subsequently introduced a bill for the enfranchisement of White women only in 1930. As Walker notes:

it was not simply that black women were excluded from the vote. The enfranchisement of white women formed part of a much larger strategy of attack by ... the ruling National Party on already enfranchised black male voters in the Cape province.¹⁴

In the end, White women got the vote because it was clear that their vote would bolster the power of White men in the Cape, and effectively minimise the impact of the black vote. From Cissie's point of view, the enfranchisement of White women served to radicalise Coloured politics, and seems to have been something of a catalyst for Cissie herself. It gave her the opening she needed, to launch her public political career.¹⁵

The 1930 parliamentary session opened on 18 January, with the Native Franchise Bill on the agenda, which sought to disenfranchise those African men who had the vote, along with the promised Women's Enfranchisement Bill. The latter granted:

the franchise to all major women in the Union of European descent ... [and that] every woman registered to vote will, just as in the case of men, be entitled to be nominated and elected as a Senator or a Member of this House or of the Provincial Council.¹⁶

In Shortmarket Square, on 21 January, Nellie Abdurahman spoke at a public meeting organised by the Women's Enfranchisement League.¹⁷ Nellie and others on the platform represented those who stood for the League's idealistic position, as Lady Rose-Innes had put

¹⁴Ibid., 312.

¹⁵When it became clear to the APO (since 1919 renamed the African People's Organisation) that the enfranchisement of White women only was imminent, certain branches began to demand women's suffrage with no colour bar. The APO's call for black women's suffrage did not represent a sudden interest in the rights of women for their own sake; rather, it recognised that White women's suffrage would reduce the power of the black male franchise. The APO asked for the extension of the restricted franchise to black women, on the same basis as the men. Neither the APO, nor White suffragists, were willing to demand universal suffrage. See *Cape Times*, 11 April 1928.

¹⁶South African Parliament: *House of Assembly Debates*, vol 14, 1930, col. 1519. The Bill therefore placed White women in an advantageous position over White men, who were subjected to a qualified franchise. Hertzog asserted that it would humiliate women if they had to prove that they were civilised: 'We assume that she is civilised and do not doubt it for a moment. To ask a White woman to sign her name, to show that she is civilised, is so ludicrous that I need only mention it to make it felt at once that it will be nothing less than an insult to the women.' In this act of chivalry, rural uneducated Afrikaner women would be enfranchised. 'Poor White' patriarchs could not be denied what their wives and daughters had; hence the Franchise Amendment Act of the following year.

it. In fact they went beyond calling for women's suffrage on the same basis as men, but on a non-racial basis.

Ray Alexander, a young Communist Party activist who had arrived from Latvia the previous November, had been told of the WEL by Ruth Alexander, whom she had met at a meeting on Birobidzhan, the newly-formed Jewish state within the USSR. Ray attended the WEL demonstration, and remembered that the speakers demanded the right of *all* women to vote. 'Ruth Alexander was in the chair, and the speakers included Mrs Roman, a Coloured woman principal, and Mrs Nellie Abdurahman.'¹⁸ Ray did not see Cissie Gool at this meeting; certainly she was not on the platform.

In March, the Bill was debated in Parliament, and Cissie made her first public appearance as a political leader. The precise timing of the evening's events is difficult to piece together. There seem to have been three separate gatherings, but no single source reports on all three. Ray Alexander, famous for her photographic memory, recalled:

I met Cissie Gool and she was leading a demonstration of women, for the enfranchisement of Coloured, African and Indian women, because ... Hertzog introduced a bill, only for white women. And that was on the 8th of March...I was very excited ... that I should come to Cape Town, and this beautiful woman is leading a demonstration for political rights.¹⁹

She continued:

I joined the demonstration... [and] I hid behind H J Isaacs furniture store in Longmarket Street because the police were beating up the demonstrators. I heard Mrs Nellie Abdurahman appeal to people to carry on the struggle for democratic rights. The police came and hit us about.²⁰

Ray reported that she then followed Cissie to the Grand Parade, where she made a speech and then led the crowd to parliament. Thus, according to Ray, Nellie and Cissie were together on Cissie's first platform. Ray did not mention a gathering in the City Hall, which

¹⁷The *Cape Times* did not report on this meeting, which is surprising as it did give coverage to women suffrage leaders gathering in Cape Town to follow the passage of the Bill. See, for example, *Cape Times*, 20 January 1930.

¹⁸Ray Alexander-Simons, unpublished autobiography.

¹⁹Ray Simons, in conversation with the author, 14 August 1997.

may have taken place shortly thereafter, followed by the demonstration at the Grand Parade and the march to Parliament.

The APO had organised a protest meeting against all the racist legislation on the agenda of the House of Assembly that session, including the Women's Enfranchisement Bill. As noted above, the APO was fully aware of the danger that this Bill posed to the voting powers of its constituency. It is most likely that Dr Abdurahman approached Cissie and invited her to share the platform that evening. She was the living embodiment of Abdurahman's argument, that brilliant, educated, highly cultured women like his own daughter were to be excluded from the franchise, whereas stupid, uneducated, White women would be able to vote. If this was his strategy, Cissie played her part to perfection. To my knowledge, her previous appearance at a gathering held under the auspices of the APO had been back in 1911, when she had read poetry and performed in piano duets. Now she swept the crowd away with her powerful rhetoric, and her dynamic presence. On the platform with Cissie were Dr Abdurahman and other APO leaders. Nellie does not seem to have joined them; she no longer appeared on platforms in automatic wifely support of Abdurahman.

According to Elizabeth Everett, Cissie 'captured the imagination of her audience who responded enthusiastically to this dynamic and passionate speaker.' Everett's references suggest that Johnny Gomas and Louis Herrman were both in the crowd, as they were the source of her information.²¹ The *Cape Times* reported that:

all the speakers emphasised the urgency for organisation, and the fact that in fighting for their rights they had to unite as non-Europeans. There should be no line of demarcation between Coloured persons and natives. They should also try and co-operate with Europeans for they had to admit they still had to learn a good deal from the Europeans, many of whom were their very good friends. What they wanted was their rights.²²

Cissie turned this around, with a gendered twist. In seconding the motion rejecting the Women's Enfranchisement Bill:

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid. She also referred to a biographical article in the *Cape Standard* in 1946, but did not refer to the *Cape Times*'s report the day after the demonstration.

²²*Cape Times*, 11 March 1930.

Mrs Z Gool advocated mixing up more with the Europeans and educating them. 'In the House now, General Hertzog is dangling his Baby Bill on his knee; General Smuts has given it his blessing; but what we must do is to see that the little devil is strangled.' It was of no use, said Mrs Gool, waiting for General Hertzog or any other leader of a party to give them their rights. They should not trust any Parliamentarian but should unite, co-operate industrially, and then be able to serve the interests of their people.²³

From her first public speech, Cissie Gool pointed to a different support base and a different political vision to that of the APO. She openly rejected parliamentary politics as futile, and her call to 'co-operate industrially' reflected her stand to the left of the APO. It also may point to a growing support base of disaffected working class Coloured men and women, in the worst years of the Great Depression. However, as Allison Drew notes, 'the political basis of black unity in South Africa lay in the common lack of democratic rights'; the APO and Cissie agreed on the need for the franchise.²⁴

The *Cape Times* reported that after the meeting, 'more than 2,500 non-Europeans marched to Parliament House to place before General Hertzog their objections to his Bill to enfranchise European women.'²⁵ As Everett's informants told it, Cissie initiated the shift from protest meeting to direct action, and organised a march on Parliament:

Not content to let the matter rest at a protest meeting, she suggested that the assembled crowd should march to Parliament to express their objections to the ministers involved. Accordingly, a large crowd followed her as she led the way to the Houses of Parliament... The marchers, plus many who had joined them *en route* now consisted of several thousand. Cissie spoke to them, asking if they were content to allow such a piece of legislation to go onto the statute book unopposed. It was the beginning of a process of erosion of the rights that the non-European people had enjoyed for so long, she continued. When she had finished speaking she went to the entrance of the House and demanded to see General Hertzog.²⁶

²³Ibid.

²⁴Drew, *Discordant comrades*, 200.

²⁵*Cape Times*, 11 March 1930.

²⁶Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 8.

According to the *Cape Times*, the Prime Minister refused to see the demonstrators, then or at any time - but this was not relayed to the crowd. Instead, the people were told that the PM was busy at present, but would see them later.

Neither Everett (whose description and analysis covered less than a page) nor the *Cape Times* mentions the demonstration in Longmarket street. Perhaps the reporter, and Everett's two informants, joined the protest at the City Hall (which had been advertised), and missed the earlier demonstration (which concerned only women, and had not been advertised in the press).

Despite the enormous energy generated by the demonstration, it was ineffective. White women only were enfranchised. For a short period, they were the most politically empowered 'group': all adult White women had the vote, without restriction, while White men still faced a restricted franchise.²⁷ On a Sunday evening, in November 1930, Cissie Gool joined her mother on a public platform. Black and White women, White mother with the vote, black daughter without it, stood together to protest this travesty of justice. According to Ray Alexander, Indira Naidu as the guest speaker, outlined the enfranchisement of women in other parts of the world. Ray recalled that it was a terribly windy, typical November's evening, and she and her comrade Johnny Gomas attended this meeting at the City Hall. As Ray Alexander recalled:

... Cissie Gool was in the Chair, and there were a number of other women on the platform [including Nellie]. The Indian woman was just starting to speak. The hall was packed, and we got seats right at the back. She talked about the great feminist movement in Europe, about the British, Scandinavian countries, and the struggle of the women in India for the right to vote and the right to be in government. She never mentioned the Soviet Union, 1917 revolution which made such an impact on women, because women got all the same rights as men. So I drew Gomas' attention to it. I stood up and asked permission to speak, and I said I'm very grateful for the wonderful speech, but the one thing she had left out was the 1917 revolution, that the women in Russia got the vote, and which encouraged other women in Europe to conduct the same struggle. Cissie Gool then called me to the platform, and I went up ... I made a speech again, and said I'm very disappointed with the new law introduced for White women, and we must struggle to get

the right of all women to vote, as in Russia. I was applauded, she thanked me for drawing her attention to a great error, and Cissie Gool asked me to stay on - made a place for me on the platform. After the meeting, Cissie invited me to her place for a party. I asked if I could take Gomas, and she said Yes, and there she introduced me to her husband, Dr AH Gool. And others - lots of people - academics, leaders of the non-European movement. APO - some of their leaders. Not Cissie Gool's father, he was not there. She invited me to come to future parties, and I did come with Gomas, met more academics and so on.²⁸

Johnny Gomas spoke to Elizabeth Everett about his memories of Cissie Gool. According to Everett:

[Gomas] was to remain her close friend until the day she died. From his reading of Marxist and Socialist literature and a study of the Russian revolution, Gomas had become convinced that a movement of the people - the workers - was the way to present a united opposition to the government. Cissie met Gomas at political and social meetings and they found that they had much in common. Neither believed that world revolution would overtake South Africa, both believed that there was much work to be done in the fight for non-European rights.²⁹

Certainly, Johnny Gomas' discussions with Cissie would have influenced her views, as did her conversations with Ray Alexander and others with whom she associated. This was a period in which Cissie was exposed to many different political ideas, and she chose to negotiate her way among them rather than to allow a single orthodoxy to dominate. At the same time, Cissie continued to study at the University of Cape Town and became increasingly friendly with Communist-inclined radicals at the university, as well as in the course of political gatherings outside. The influence of Harry Snitcher and Sam Kahn was as significant as that of Gomas or Ray, and these young White Jewish law students' names would thereafter be linked to Cissie's.

Whereas Cissie's relationship with Sam Kahn is a matter of common knowledge and indeed, urban legend, the roots of that relationship are hidden. Cissie and Sam, a lawyer, lived

²⁷They too were soon fully enfranchised in terms of the Franchise Amendment Act of 1931.

²⁸Ray Alexander-Simons, unpublished autobiography. See also Rassool, *District Six*, 6.

²⁹Everett, Cissie (Zainunnissa) Gool, 8 - 9. See also D Musson, *Johnny Gomas: Voice of the working class. A political biography*. Cape Town: buchu books, 1989.

together for some years in Cissie's house. Eventually he left her, but they remained close friends. They probably met through Cissie's acquaintance with Harry Snitcher. All three were studying at the University of Cape Town, and oral recollections suggest that Harry was friendly with Cissie before she met Sam.³⁰ All three were linked in one way or another to Farrington, or to Bodmer, or Zwarenstein, or others in the Hogben circle. Sam Kahn was studying for a BA when Cissie returned to study at the University in 1929, and was one of Ben Farrington's students.³¹

In 1930, Cissie continued with her BA degree and registered at the University of Cape Town on 3 March, having written a supplementary examination in English II, which she passed.³² She had passed German I at the end of the previous year,³³ and now registered for Latin I, Social Anthropology and Elementary French. Louis had studied Social Anthropology I and II, and may have influenced Cissie in her decision to study this subject.³⁴ It was the first indication since 1918 (when she studied Ethics) of an interest in what were later known as the social sciences (there was no such faculty at the University at the time). A lecture Cissie would give in 1934 suggests that she found this subject interesting, but as with politics, she did not pursue Social Anthropology beyond the first course.³⁵ In fact, Cissie dropped French (also a subject Louis had studied the previous year) and instead attended classes in Psychology I, confirming her shift towards more people-oriented subjects.³⁶

Cissie's registration form had been stamped 'eligible for degree', but she did not graduate in 1930.³⁷ She did not write the examination in Psychology in December, apparently due to illness, and was granted a supplementary examination which she passed the following

³⁰A C, in conversation with the author, 31 August 2001.

³¹See, for instance, University of Cape Town (hereafter UCT) Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1929; Examination Results, Box 2: University Examinations, November 1929.

³²UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1930, 988; Examination Results, Box 2: University Examinations, November 1929, BA (Gool, Mrs Z - English II (F), German I (3)); Supplementary Examination, February 1930: English II. Zainunissa [sic] Gool passed in the third class.

³³UCT Archives: Examination Results Box 3: University Examination Results November 1929. There were 40 men in the class and 18 women. As usual, Cissie was the only married woman.

³⁴UCT Archives: Examination Results Box 2: Supplementary Examination results. Distinction for BA, 1929: Special consideration - 2nd class in I, 1st class in II. L Herrman - Social Anthropology; Register and Marks: Examination Entries, Final BA 1929: French I, Hebrew II, Phonetics II, Social Anthropology I and II, Zoology II (second class).

³⁵See below.

³⁶UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1931.

³⁷UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1930, 988.

February.³⁸ The illness is not specified, but the deferral of Cissie's examination may have been due to an acute illness or possibly to her chronic asthma, which would dog her throughout her adult life. Alternatively, Cissie's involvement in the women's suffrage campaign certainly would have diverted her from fully concentrating on her studies, and this may have contributed to illness. Presumably her husband wrote the medical certificate which gave her access to the supplementary examination; although she had moved out of Bay View, she and A H maintained good relations. The private details of her family life have proved difficult to penetrate for this period; her experiences at the University and in the public eye in this year have left more traces than her private life has.³⁹

A H Gool has been represented in the literature as 'less politically active' than his brother Goolam and sister Jane,⁴⁰ but after his involvement in the Indian protest campaigns, he did participate in left politics in Cape Town, and initially Cissie accompanied him. If Cissie Gool was irrepressible, A H undoubtedly facilitated the articulation and fulfilment of her life choices.⁴¹ In the meantime, 1931 would see the full enfranchisement of White men, while the radicalisation of the UCT Students' Representative Council reflected Cissie's own shift away from the circles of the Hogben set to the more hardline political positions of youngsters in the Communist Party of South Africa. Cissie's increasing involvement in political campaigns off campus suggests a shift in focus in that direction, but she was still registered, and continued to study for her BA. At the same time, law students Sam Kahn and Harry Snitcher honed their political maneuvering skills in student societies and the Students' Representative Council and prepared to take on active roles as lawyers in the CPSA. No evidence has come to light to suggest that Cissie joined them and learnt skills of political

³⁸UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1931, 1032.

³⁹Selim Gool has recently made available the first chapter of his memoir, in which he discusses frankly the political roles of his parents, Goolam and Halima Gool (who used the pseudonym Hawa Ahmed), and how these related to their private life. As he remembered, 'she extremely personalised her politics'. It is very clear that, although both parents were active in the movement, the patriarchal hierarchy of the home was replicated outside it. At home, Goolam ruled; so did he in politics. In both arenas his wife played a supporting role. This was despite Halima's dynamic personality, and an oratorical style to rival Cissie's: 'People in the [Unity] Movement ... remember her as an organiser of note with the nick-name, The General.' Selim Gool has evidence that his mother did much of the research for Goolam's speeches; she played the role of supportive researcher and administrator - but as Selim Gool points out, her role has not been acknowledged. Her political role has been ignored, and she has been relegated to a 'footnote in history'

⁴⁰G Lewis, *Between the wire and the wall*.

⁴¹When she was incarcerated in 1960 in the wake of the Langa and Sharpeville killings, nearly two decades after their divorce, A H visited her regularly (Amy Thornton in conversation, 10 April 2000).

organisation through such involvement; more important for her was her parents' political participation, it seems. However, she was associated with leading members of two student societies formed on campus in 1930, as well as with students who attempted to radicalise the SRC.

Little is known about Sam Kahn in this period. He graduated (BA) at the end of 1930 with a distinction in Greek, before going on to the LLB degree. Sam and Harry Snitcher were involved in student politics⁴². Together with other radical students, they caused a fair degree of irritation in the otherwise staid Students' Representative Council. Sam was elected Secretary of the SRC in 1931, Harry was a leading member of the Students' Political Society, and Hogben had started the SRA, which was taken over by Harry Zwarenstein on the former's departure. These two societies were closely linked in their attempt to politicise the UCT campus.⁴³ Snitcher and Sam Kahn cut their political teeth at UCT, as many future radicals would do. Cissie's political association with the University was quite different. I have found no direct evidence that she was interested in student politics: she was already actively involved in national politics, and student politics might have seemed dull in comparison to her leadership of the March 8 demonstration.

At the beginning of 1931, Cissie registered for her final BA year. Again, her form was stamped 'Eligible for degree'. Having passed the Psychology I supplementary examination in February, she registered for Psychology II and History I. However, Cissie did not graduate at the end of 1931. She passed History I, but did not write the examination for Psychology II, due to illness. She was granted a supplementary exam for this course, which she duly passed the following February.⁴⁴

Allison Drew notes that, 'for a couple of years in the early 1930s, the Cape Town left retained some fluidity. There was still a degree of diversity and eclecticism amongst Cape Town socialists.'⁴⁵ Cissie Gool epitomised this spirit, even later, when lines were more rigidly drawn. 1931 saw the formation of the International Socialist Club: 'Regulars

⁴² UCT Archives: Student Representative Council records: Minutes of executive meeting, 31 march 1932 ff.

⁴³ These connections and activities may be traced through the UCT Council and Senate minutes, as well as the SRC minutes.

⁴⁴ UCT Archives: Council minutes, 8 December 1931. She passed History I with a third class pass. She was still the only married woman in her class. See also Council minutes, 29 March 1932.

included Communists, ... together with assorted anarchists and social democrats...'⁴⁶ A couple of members of the Club, including Joe Pick and Manny Lopes, both of whom had been expelled from the CPSA, decided to form a 'self-consciously Trotskyist study group, called the Marxist Educational League'⁴⁷. At the time, Cissie seems to have been more concerned with protests against the progressive loss of the black (male) vote that came with the full enfranchisement of White men in terms of the Franchise Amendment Act.

On 27 April, 1931, a protest meeting was held under the auspices of the APO, in the City Hall, against this and other discriminatory legislation, including the Riotous Assemblies Act. Everett does not mention this meeting, and Cissie's speech has not been preserved, but the *Cape Times* reported a little of it:

She denounced the failure to include coloured persons in the franchise legislation.

'Perhaps their voices at the meeting would only lift to the ceiling and die in echoes', she said, "but perhaps a more constructive policy might be evolved. The whole basis of the Nationalist reasoning on the franchise legislation was fraudulent and false."⁴⁸

Hertzog had justified the exclusion of Coloured people from the franchise because the 'Native Question' had not been resolved: he had blamed the opposition party for not having passed a bill which defined Coloured - so that they could have been included in the present legislation. By failing to define the category Coloured, the government could not effectively discriminate against and between 'coloureds' and 'natives'. Cissie Gool went on to proclaim that she might indeed be 'going Red', and then stated:

In the face of so much oppression it is hard to keep one's temper, although it is often better to be patient and reap the benefit in the end. The fact is that we are not yet politically thirsty enough to rise to a man and a woman and demand our rights.'

⁴⁵Drew, *Discordant comrades*, 139.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Pick was in fact a founder member of the CPSA. Sheridan Johns, *Raising the Red flag: The International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914-1932*. Bellville: Mayibuye, 1995, 123.

⁴⁸*Cape Times*, 11 April 1931.

She turned the racist stereotype on its head: 'A civilised people is being ruled by an ignorant oligarchy.' Then Cissie's father stood up and referred to the radicalisation of people like his daughter, by the racist measures of the government:⁴⁹

I do not regret that Mrs Gool has expressed herself as she did. I am not surprised that she is going 'Red' because if you heard the record of the Government, if you have followed their actions closely ... you can come to one conclusion only - that Mrs Gool is still but a moderate person. It is the Government that has created agitators. The Nationalist Government has already driven men to extremes. Now it is forcing women to speak of starting a 'red revolution'.⁵⁰

Dr Abdurahman's speech (which, unlike Cissie's, has been preserved) nicely entitled 'Franchise Rights and Wrongs', proposed the separation of the Cape from the Union of South Africa, because it was clear that 'the Nationalists had lied to the coloured men, lied to the coloured women, and had lied the rights of the whole coloured people away.'⁵¹ He went on to discuss the Women's Enfranchisement Act of 1930. The APO's concerns with 'civilised standards' is clear. Abdurahman could not support an unqualified, universal franchise:

One of the most recent actions of this Nationalist Parliament sitting in Cape Town now, is to say by virtue of the Women's Suffrage Act, that the Virgin Mary, an Asiatic, may not have a vote. That is a doubly blasphemous thing to do... he, the Rev. D F Malan ... has forced through Parliament an Act which lays down that the Mother of Christ shall not have a seat in Parliament. It is true! There is no blinking the fact: the white woman shall have the vote, but not the coloured woman. Here you have a coloured lady (Mrs Gool) and I say it not because she is my daughter, whom you have heard speak, and she speaks better than 99 per cent of white women in this country. Not only does she speak better, but she has more brains than the majority of the white women in South Africa.

There she sits and yet by this Act she is put down lower than the ordinary uneducated white domestic scullery maid. Furthermore, I ask you to bear in mind that there are 143,000 whites in this country who are either mental defectives or on the border line, besides 100,000 poor whites. So out of a population of 1,750 000 whites you have some

⁴⁹UCT M&A: BCZA 83/30, reprint from the *Cape Times*, 1 May 1931.

⁵⁰Protest against the women's enfranchisement act, 1930, and the franchise amendment act, 1931', in R E van der Ross, ed. *Say it out loud*, 148-155. See also UCT M&A: BCZA 83/30.

⁵¹The speech was reprinted for the Cape Area Branch of the Empire Group of South Africa: UCT BCZA 83/30.

250,000 people who should never be permitted to have the vote. Yet that lady sitting on the platform, and others just as highly endowed and with equally high cultural attainments, shall not have the vote, while mental defectives and poor whites are now fully enfranchised citizens.'⁵²

For her part, Cissie half-jokingly declared that this might be her last speech from a political platform: 'I fear that I shall be black-listed as a revolutionary'. As her father agreed, she might be the first woman to be banned under the Riotous Assemblies Act.

Whether this threat was enough to divert Cissie from the political path, or whether it in fact had a radicalising effect on her, is unclear. She made an important point in biographical terms, when she indicated: 'She was going out of political life, but when she came back she would call her own meetings.'⁵³ Here was a clear statement of her planned direction.

Whether for fear of being arrested or banned, or for other reasons, Cissie Gool was not yet prepared to enter a full time public political life. On the other hand, she planned to return, and when she did so, it would not be under the banner of the APO. Her warning that she was 'going Red' pointed to the radicalisation of Cissie Gool, a woman who would, sooner or later - in fact, in less than five years - 'call her own meetings.'⁵⁴ As a resident of District Six remembered:

Nou daar het dit begin. En dan toe Cissie Gool nou toe so *meeting* gehou met mense. En toe begin ons luister. En as sy *meetings* gecalled het en dan het ons ook gaan aanluister by die Parade. Ons moet ... note vat van dinge. Sy het ons *wise* gemaak om *note* te vat van dinge. Maar al die mense het nie, sy was maar baie jonk.⁵⁵

If Cissie Gool was radicalised, *inter alia*, by racist legislation giving White women the vote, so too was she via her friends at the University of Cape Town and elsewhere who linked her into circles of the Communist Party of South Africa. Cissie's shift to the left may have been influenced by her mother's actions, as a woman no longer identified as Abdurahman's wife (but still respected in the community). When Ray Alexander, by now a prominent CPSA leader and trade unionist, needed a place for striking workers to meet, she turned without

⁵²Van der Ross, *Say it out loud*, 148 - 151.

⁵³*Cape Times*, 28 April 1931.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵UCT M&A: BC 1004: District Six interviews, Western Cape Oral History Project (transcripts), Mrs Tiefa Adams, interviewer and date unknown. Translation: 'Now there it began. And then Cissie Gool held meetings with people. And we began to listen. And when she called meetings, then we went to listen at the Parade. We took note of things. But not everyone (did so). She was still very young.'

hesitation to Nellie Abdurahman. In September 1931, the African Clothing Factory in Cape Town went on strike, because of a reduction in wages of 10/-. Ray approached Nellie for the use of a house, to which she agreed, and the strikers met there, in District Six, were fed and had study classes provided by Alexander and other CPSA members.⁵⁶ Ray also organised a meeting with a Comintern official in 1932, to be held 'at Nellie Abdurahman's place.'⁵⁷ Nellie clearly supported the Party's activities, although she was not herself a member.

Cissie Gool's position on the Party at this time is unknown. It is generally assumed that Sam Kahn influenced Cissie Gool in this regard. However, her own interest in and support of the Party may well have preceded his, although he certainly joined many years before she did. According to Ray Alexander, Sam joined the Party in 1933, at her mother's house, 14 Lodge street.⁵⁸ Cissie's trajectory to the left was thus influenced by numerous groups. On the one hand, she was influenced by her mother as well as by her connections with the Ruth-Ben-Lancelot-Bodmer set, which encouraged broad-mindedness. Later Sam Kahn, Harry Snitcher, and non-UCT Communists like Johnny Gomas and Ray Alexander, as well as Eddie Roux, all of whom were squarely focused on Communist politics would play a role. It is clear that during the early thirties, Cissie Gool was friendly with many in the Party, and gave it her support.

In 1932, Cissie finally graduated with a BA degree at the July ceremony at Hiddingh Hall, the programme for which is missing from the graduation programmes in the UCT bound collection.⁵⁹ In April she had registered late. She was now working towards her MA in Psychology, the first black woman to do so at UCT.⁶⁰ On her registration form she indicated, in the space left for 'Degree held', 'BA (1932)', but then crossed out 1932 and replaced it with 1931. The required auxiliary courses for the MA in Psychology were two courses in Psychology and a course in one of the following: Physiology, Logic, Ethics or Social Anthropology.⁶¹ At this time the degree was awarded by examination only; no dissertation

⁵⁶Ray Alexander-Simons, unpublished autobiography, chapter 2.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸When Ray's mother died, Sam spoke at her funeral, in honour of this fact (Ibid).

⁵⁹UCT M&A: Bound collection of UCT graduation programmes, 1919 - 1933.

⁶⁰UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1933, 1510.

⁶¹UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 28 April 1931.

was required.⁶² Having passed the Psychology II supplementary examination, Cissie was eligible to attend the MA classes. However, graduation at the end of the year was problematic.

The regulations for the MA degree stated:

Every candidate must attend at the University approved courses for at least one academic year subsequent to satisfying the conditions for the degree in virtue of which he [sic] became a candidate for the degree.⁶³

Therefore, because Cissie had only fulfilled the required condition in terms of her Psychology II supplementary exam at the beginning of the academic year of 1932, she could not graduate with the MA degree that year.⁶⁴ However, the official 'Schedule of Examination Results, December 1932' indicated that Mrs Z Gool and Miss J Alexander had both passed the Psychology examinations and were eligible for the degree of MA.⁶⁵ The graduation programme indicates that Jessie graduated in December, but that Cissie did not. She appears in the December 1933 programme instead. This, not surprisingly, has led historians to believe that she graduated then. However, all is seldom as it seems, and graduation programmes, perhaps, can lie.

If Cissie did not graduate in December 1932, the following report published in the *Sun* newspaper, 23 December, 1932, under the banner 'Our First Coloured Woman MA', would be incomprehensible:

This week we extend our heartiest congratulations to Mrs Z Gool (wife of Dr A H Gool) of Cape Town, and daughter of our Dr A Abdurahman, who has been successful in

⁶²Some MA courses did require a dissertation, for example Social Anthropology. See UCT Archives: Examination Reports, Box 4: 1932 and February 1933: External Examiner's report, Social Anthropology, 8 December 1932.

⁶³UCT Archives: UCT Council minutes, 28 April 1931: 'Regulations for the degree of MA'; UCT Calendar, 1931.

⁶⁴Paragraph 91 of the University Statutes stated that 'no candidate for the degree of master in the faculty of arts or science shall be allowed to present himself for examination until he has attended the University for a period of at least one year after being admitted to the degree of bachelor.' (General Purposes Committee Minutes of Meetings 28 November 1928 and 5 December 1928 (joint minutes)).

⁶⁵UCT Archives: Council minutes, 13 December 1932, Schedule of Examination results, December 1932. Jessie Iris Alexander, born in 1911, lived with her father in Claremont. She graduated with a BA in 1931 and was working for an MA and then B Ed. (Student Registration Forms, 1932, 950.) See also UCT Calendar, 1933: Examination results, 144 ff. June 1932: No listing for Mrs Z Gool. She is listed as having passed examinations for MA. UCT Archives: Examination Reports, Box 4: 1932 and February 1933: Examination Report, November 1932, Psychology. Both Cissie and Jessie passed; neither achieved first or second class honours.

gaining her MA in Psychology at the University of Cape Town. ... She is the first non-European woman in South Africa to obtain this distinction - as so far she is the first non-European woman who has an MA.⁶⁶

This report indicates that Cissie must have graduated at the end of 1932. The report continued:

We understand that Mrs Gool is not yet quite satisfied with this notable achievement, for next year she intends continuing her studies at the University for the Degree of Bachelor of Education.⁶⁷

It is significant that Cissie did not declare her intention to take on a full-time political career. Indeed, she did register again in 1933, but for the degree of PhD in Psychology, and English III.⁶⁸ The University seemed willing to accept Cissie for whatever degree she chose to register. There are no comments about her in this regard in the Council, Senate or Finances and General Purposes Committee Minutes. Rosie joined her sister at UCT, and registered for the Diploma in Public health. She indicated that she was 'living with parents', ie with her mother.⁶⁹ For some reason, although Rosie attended the course and was eligible to write the examination in June, she did not do so. The student register for the exam indicated next to her name: 'absent'.⁷⁰

Meanwhile, on the streets of Cape Town, despite the eclecticism of the early 1930s, Drew notes that 'local anti-Trotskyism on the left was rife.'⁷¹ Partly due to the influence of Gina Medem, the local Gezerd, 'a predominantly Jewish, Yiddish-speaking CPSA- aligned organization', expelled Trotskyists: 'Comrades of Trotsky cannot be our comrades. They are all expelled.'⁷² These ex-members established the Lenin Club, launched in July 1933, again mostly Yiddish-speaking. The tensions between Communists and Trotskyists were evident not only in expulsions, but also in physical brawls, at least one of which was so violent that the Trotskyist leaders were hospitalised.⁷³

⁶⁶*Sun*, 23 December 1932.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1933, 1510: 'Degree .. For which student is working - English III, PhD Psychology.'

⁶⁹UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1933, 965. Degree held: MB,CHB (Glas) 1927. She registered for 'Diploma in Public health'.

⁷⁰UCT Archives: Examiners Reports, February 1933, February 1934 and 1935; University Examinations, June 1933: Chemistry and Physics DPH (Diploma of Public Health).

⁷¹Drew, *Discordant comrades*, 140.

⁷²*Ibid.*

⁷³*Ibid.*, 141.

The Lenin Club incorporated the Marxist Educational League and the International Socialist Club, and soon attracted IB Tabata, Goolam Gool and Janub Gool. A H Gool was a supporter if not a member; the Club's regular study class was held at his offices in District Six.⁷⁴ Everett does not mention Cissie as a member of the Lenin Club, but she may have accompanied her husband, as she did to other meetings at this time, given that meetings were held in his offices. She would have been struck by the difference between the intellectually more rigorous tradition of Tabata and Jane Gool (partly associated with Fort Hare), and her own freer discourse as part of the UCT set.⁷⁵

Whether or not Cissie attended meetings of the Lenin Club - the establishment of her friendships with Snitcher and Kahn suggests other political spaces - a rival to the Lenin Club, the October Club was established by Communists, also with the aim of providing political education. Key local Communists such as Bill Andrews, Johnny Gomas, Sam Kahn, Ray Alexander, Jack Simons, Jack Cope and Oscar Mpetha participated at one time or another; and so did A H Gool. Everett states that Cissie initially accompanied her husband and later Sam Kahn, to these meetings, held in the Stakesby-Lewis hostel.⁷⁶ As Everett reports it, according to a confidential informant:

The evenings at the Stakesby-Lewis [Hostel] were less formal and the nature of the debates depended very much upon who attended. Cissie was a lively and vociferous participant in these meetings, but she was not always well received, particularly by the more serious political theoreticians. There were people who found her ideas shallow and naive and who felt that although she spoke impressively, she did not have a well-thought out analysis or a profound understanding of socialist or communist thought and doctrine.⁷⁷

In 1934, Cissie Gool was back at the University. Having apparently decided not to pursue the doctorate,⁷⁸ she returned to her original plan of 1918, and registered for the degree of

⁷⁴Ibid., 142.

⁷⁵Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool. See also, A Drew, *South Africa's radical tradition: A documentary history, vol 1: 1907-1950*. Cape Town: buchu books, Mayibuye Books and UCT Press, 1996, 24.

⁷⁶Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 10. See *Cape Times*, 18 November 1937.

⁷⁷Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 10.

⁷⁸She would try again in 1963, after she had graduated with the LLB degree. She died that year.

MB,ChB.⁷⁹ In the interim, the university had changed its policy with regard to entrance qualifications for the degree. In the early years, matriculation (or equivalent) was sufficient, but in 1931 the requirement of matriculation Mathematics was added. This would have excluded Cissie, but the Senate Report for 1931 indicated that those who had matriculated before 1933 would not be debarred from the MB,ChB if they had not passed Mathematics at matriculation level.⁸⁰ At the same time, the Medical BA was scrapped, although students could still register for a Medical BSc.⁸¹ For black students, there was still the problem of exclusion on practical grounds from the final three years of training, due to lack of facilities at local hospitals. The university corresponded with the Cape Hospital Board, to 'ascertain the attitude of the ... Board in reference to the admission of coloured [sic] medical students for clinical studies in hospitals under its jurisdiction.'⁸² The Board responded in September 1932 that it had 'resolved that such students be allowed access to the non-European wards only of the hospitals for the purpose of clinical study.'⁸³ The Senate reported 'that the number of beds in such wards was at present insufficient for the clinical training of non-European medical students' and the Council therefore 'resolved to request the Senate to investigate the possibility of utilising the non-European wards in hospitals in the Cape Peninsula, other than the New Somerset Hospital and the Peninsula Maternity Home, for the clinical training of non-European students.'⁸⁴ In the meantime (and indeed for more than another decade) Coloured, or 'non-European' students could not complete their medical training at UCT. Given this state of affairs, it is strange that Cissie considered this path. Nevertheless, she decided to have one last shot at medical training, and was duly accepted. She was exempted from the Special Courses in Zoology and Botany, on the basis of previous study. Cissie remained in the faculty of medicine for only one year. It seems that she only wrote an examination in Chemistry, which she failed (no supplementary examination granted); the other marks indicated for her for that year are a third class pass in Botany and a first in Zoology, both of which were the courses from which she had been exempted.⁸⁵ Whatever Cissie's experience with the medical faculty at UCT, she decided to

⁷⁹UCT Archives: Student Registration Forms, 1934, 1672. The registration form records: 'MA 1933; Degree working towards: MB,ChB.'

⁸⁰UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 26 April 1931: Report of the Senate, 1930.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 30 May 1931.

⁸³UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 27 September 1932: Letter from Secretary Cape Hospital Board, to UCT Registrar, 10 September 1932.

⁸⁴UCT Archives: Council Minutes, 25 October 1932.

⁸⁵CT Archives: Examination Reports 1934 and February 1935: 'First to Fifth year Medical Students, 1934'.

finally lay to rest her ambition to be a medical doctor. Years later, she explained her abandonment of medicine in terms of the long, arduous hours required for laboratory work. She mentioned nothing of the barriers imposed by racism within the university.⁸⁶ Cissie's shifts between different courses of study, always with an eye on the Medical Faculty, suggest that at this stage Cissie had not yet decided on the direction she wanted to pursue in her life. Perhaps it was the death of her dream to be a medical doctor which encouraged her to turn her focus from academia to the path of political activism, for which she had already demonstrated enormous oratorical talent.⁸⁷

Simply 'recovering' Cissie Gool's university record demonstrates the importance she placed in her education.⁸⁸ Cissie's years at the University of Cape Town were neither incidental to her political, nor to her intellectual development. Tertiary education, particularly, one imagines, at post-graduate level, facilitated the development of Cissie's analytical and deductive skills, as the Hogben set honed her debating abilities. As a post-graduate Psychology student, Cissie had access to new ideas and alternative ways of understanding, explaining and challenging her social world. In the process of studying psychology and social anthropology, she developed what she described as a healthy scepticism,⁸⁹ a profoundly secular frame of mind. Although Cissie Gool did not take up formal teaching, she did begin her public speaking career by lecturing to the public. One such lecture was given at the Adult School of the Unitarian Church, Cape Town, on Wednesday evening, 18 April, 1934.⁹⁰

By 1934, Cissie was an active member of the Capetonian left. The Gools' weekly political socials continued into the mid-thirties, providing a unique space in this increasingly hardline political environment, where activists of widely different perspective could meet. It may have been the only space where Dr Abdurahman, IB Tabata or Goolam Gool, Bodmer and

⁸⁶See clippings from UCT M&A

⁸⁷The next time she did register, it was when she was working as a City Councillor. She registered for the degree of LLB, in 1940 and again in 1941, 1942, 1944 through 1947, 1949 through 1953, and 1957 through 1962, when she graduated. She was admitted to the Bar a few weeks before she died. One of the reasons it took so many years for her to succeed, was, as Amy Thornton recalled, that she struggled with accountancy; her persistence in eventually mastering this reflects a tenacious personality (Amy Thornton, personal communication, 10 April 2000).

⁸⁸Links between her university career and her political career are not explored in any of the literature.

⁸⁹*Sun*, 27 April 1934.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

Sam Kahn could gather together and simply debate. All were united by their commitment to anti-segregation, as in the Hogben set. As Hirson records:

[w]ith Ruth and Hogben departed, the salon seems to have been replaced with new, more politically orientated circles of which there are few details available. Some followers of the Trotskyist movement gathered at the house of Y Burlak and listened to music on seventy-eight discs, and there was also a gathering at the house of Dr Abdul Hamin [sic] Gool, Cissie's general practitioner husband ...

The focus of the gathering had altered, the faces were different [not entirely: Bodmer, Eddie Roux and others attended both] and the numbers involved had shrunk. The most significant change was the presence of black faces which reflected the changing nature of South African 'liberation' politics, and the divergences in the ranks of the left.⁹¹

Rassool states that visitors included:

all the luminaries in the field of academe, art, music and politics. No doubt for fun ... [Dr Gool] always invited politicians of all shades and enjoyed instigating their fierce war of words. Among those present at various times were Fred Bodmer, Gregoire Boonzaaier, Terence McCaw, Ben Kies, Paul Kostin, Wolf Kiebel, J G and Dora Taylor, ... Jane [Gool], I B Tabata, Eddie Roux, Goolam Gool, Eli Weinberg, Waradeya [sic] Abdurahman, Dr Abdullah Abdurahman, Leah Solomon, Zaid Gamiet. Those were the days when politicians did not boycott opponents but argued their cases toe to toe, or when the house became too crowded, cheek by jowl!⁹²

Rassool also claims that 'there, in pharaonic style, [Dr Gool] held sway, ably assisted by the women who loved him: Cissy [sic] Gool, Freda Lock and Lilian Isaacson.' It is a commonplace that Cissie and her husband were living separate lives in the early 1930s, but it is unlikely that she and the other women with whom A H would be linked romantically would co-host these parties. Rassool does admit that he was not personally present at these parties.⁹³

⁹¹B Hirson, *The Cape Town intellectuals: Ruth Schechter and her Circle, 1907-1934*. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001, 170 - 171.

⁹²Rassool, *District Six*, 6.

⁹³Ibid.

Hirson presents a similar portrait of a night at the Gools'. It was here that Sam Kahn, by now a card-carrying member of the CPSA, and Cissie are finally directly linked. One Saturday evening in 1934, Sam was observed deep in conversation with Bodmer, who had not abandoned political debate after Hogben's departure. This moment, captured almost as a photographic still, symbolises the moment before Cissie took the plunge into full time political work the following year. At this moment, she gathered about her - and AH - a wide range of political opinions, epitomising Drew's comment on the fluidity of the left in the early 1930s. Hirson quotes from a memoir of Eva Sachs who, with her partner, Bernard Hertzberg, a refugee from Germany, attended one of the parties:

... We were both received with open arms, not only by the doctor but also by all the diverse company. Every Saturday, Dr Gool and his wife Cissie held open house. It was the only dwelling in this racially divided city where folks from all walks of life, and any kind of origin, met, in defiance of ingrained custom. Assembled there was a veritable League of Nations. We met ... Frederick Bodmer. Next to him sat Sam Kahn, a leading Stalinist Communist. Painters were there too: Gregoire Boonzaier, the son of a Die Burger cartoonist ...; and Frieda Locke, a painter of note ... Cissie presided over this gathering with her husband. She was sitting next to her father ... busy berating him, calling him an Uncle Tom, for his lack of radical opposition to the prevailing political and social system in South Africa.

I spotted an African intellectual, Tabata, a prominent member of the Trotskyite Spartacus Club, in earnest conversation with Dr Eddie Roux... In another corner of the room I observed Hans Friedrich, a rabid Stalinist and refugee from Nazi Germany ...⁹⁴

On 1 December 1934, celebrations were to have been held to commemorate the anniversary of slave emancipation, but the APO-based organisers woke up too late to meet this deadline, and the commemorative events were held the following January.⁹⁵ The Lenin Club organised a rally at Green Point stadium, and distributed *Workers of South Africa, Awake!*⁹⁶ Communists were also busy organising around this anniversary. The CPSA used this opportunity for propaganda; Johnny Gomas organised and sold two thousand copies of a CPSA pamphlet at these rallies.⁹⁷

⁹⁴Hirson, *The Cape Town intellectuals*, 170 - 171.

⁹⁵ Ray Alexander, Unpublished autobiography.

⁹⁶Drew, *Discordant comrades*, 142.

⁹⁷Ray Alexander, Unpublished autobiography.

The days of political comradeship across ideological boundaries seemed numbered. Early in 1935, the Lenin Club formed the Communist League of South Africa (CLSA), which split into two factions, one establishing the Workers' Party of South Africa (WPSA), the latter including IB Tabata and Janub Gool. In June the WPSA withdrew from the Lenin Club and established the Spartacus Club - 'an intellectual and cultural circle' - and Spartacus Bantu Study Class - in opposition.⁹⁸ Goolam Gool and others remained in the Lenin Club, which dissolved itself in 1936, under the auspices of the CLSA. Gool was chairman. Drew relates that Goolam Gool, as a medical doctor, had access to the African 'locations', and that other members of the CLSA would gain access by hiding in the boot of his Nash.⁹⁹

Cissie's political activism gained momentum in 1935. She, A H Gool, Sam Kahn and others participated in the establishment of the Anti-Fascist League in Cape Town in February 1935, in the wake of Hitler's accession to power.¹⁰⁰ The League declared itself to be:

a non-political non-sectarian organisation which is open to all, irrespective of race or colour, and aims at combating the growing menace of fascism in South Africa.¹⁰¹

Cissie spoke at the first public meeting, held in the City Hall Banqueting Hall. She 'declared that she was a new recruit to the anti-Fascist movement ... and urged all responsible people to come forward and "stamp out one of the worst pests" they had had in South Africa.'¹⁰² This seems to have been Cissie's first political appearance since 1931, and she shared the platform with Sam Kahn and others. The *Sun* referred to her as 'Mrs A H Gool' in its introductory piece, and in a report of the meeting itself, referred to her as 'Mrs A Z Gool'; these initials were included in the headline. In the body of the piece, she was referred to as 'Mrs A Z Gool, MA'. It is likely that the paper assumed that she was Mrs A H, Dr Gool's wife (in its introductory piece), but that she chose to be known by her own initial, as Mrs 'Z' Gool, and that the *Sun* was confused by her relinquishing her husband's name. It was, indeed, an important symbolic act, which positioned her as a relatively autonomous individual. Others in the Party would keep their birth family surnames, even after they married. Cissie came to the movement as Mrs Gool, and had no desire to return to being an Abdurahman. To be a married woman gave her status within the District Six

⁹⁸Drew, *South Africa's radical tradition*, vol 1, 24.

⁹⁹Drew, *Discordant comrades*, 143.

¹⁰⁰Ray Alexander and other CPSA members were also part of this initiative, although A H Gool's presence indicates that it was not wholly Party-dominated.

¹⁰¹*Sun*, 15 February 1935.

community, but she relinquished her husband's initials, thereby taking the best of both worlds. Her 'new' name, Mrs Z Gool, also suggests a new beginning, the initiation of her political career. It also provided something of a smokescreen for her association with Sam Kahn, which may have become significant around this time; according to one source, she left her husband the following year, although Rustum Gool remembers the split as coming much earlier.¹⁰³ At this Anti-Fascist League gathering, Cissie and Sam made their first public appearance together.

They spoke again on 17 February, at a meeting of the Anti-Fascist League held in District Six, in the Metro Bioscope, Hanover Street (just along from A H Gool's surgery). According to the *Sun* reporter, 'Mrs Z Gool, MA', the chief speaker of the evening, said 'in her violent condemnation of the system' that "Since the passing of the Act of Union in 1910, non-Europeans have suffered from a European dictatorship, being systematically robbed of every political right. But even this will be intensified under a Fascist regime."¹⁰⁴ Cissie had lost none of the magnetism displayed in her appearances in 1930 and 1931. Sam called for worker unity in the face of the government's divisive labour tactics. Then Cissie spoke:

I cannot offer you any message of hope for your present position... But rather warn you of even further dangers lying ahead, and of worse sufferings [sic] you will be subjected to if Fascism is the order of the day.

As the *Sun* reported it, Cissie then went on to explain that fascism:

was not a revolutionary movement, aimed at upsetting or changing a system of Government, it was essentially capitalistic. A desperate expedient of a Capitalistic Government to try and solve problems arising from its own mismanagement ...¹⁰⁵

According to Everett, AH Gool was one of the speakers, but this is not mentioned in her source, the *Sun* report.¹⁰⁶

In 1935, Cissie Gool, Johnny Gomas, Jimmy La Guma and A Brown represented Coloured members of the CPSA when they gave evidence to the Commission of Inquiry into the Coloured Population, which included her father. If Cissie was a member of the Party, which

¹⁰²Ibid.

¹⁰³Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 11; see Chapter Five below.

¹⁰⁴*Sun*, 22 February 1935.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

seems clear from the Commission's evidence, Ray Alexander did not know it. According to Ray, who was on the Central Committee, Cissie did not officially join the Party until 1939, after which time she was elected onto the Political Bureau.¹⁰⁷ It is difficult to judge Cissie's commitment to Communism from her evidence to the Commission. Indeed, the conversation bordered on the bizarre, with much time being used debating the importance of permitting black sporting teams to play against White. At times, Dr Abdurahman's interrogation of Cissie reads as a personal challenge: she could not explain how she intended to liberate Coloured people, where he had failed. Nevertheless, the fact that Cissie had been nominated to represent the Party suggests that she was at the very least very sympathetic towards Communism, and was probably a member. It also points to the tiny number of black members of the Party in the mid-1930s.¹⁰⁸

According to Alex La Guma, it was his father, James La Guma who, early in 1935, called together several members of the Fifteen Group, a discussion club to which he belonged, and they met in the backyard of his home at No 1 Roger Street in District Six. Among those present were figures well known in the Coloured community, such as Christian Ziervogel, Abdurasiet Brown, John Paulsen, Gomas and others. There they decided to revive the anti-colour bar, anti-imperialism movement,¹⁰⁹ and formed the first committee of the National Liberation League of South Africa.¹¹⁰

Cissie Gool is absent from this list, as are any women, or any of the Gools or others associated with Trotskyist tendencies. Apparently, this meeting of Communist men drew up a draft programme, and used £50 of La Guma's money for furniture and to rent offices on the corner of Tennant and Longmarket streets.¹¹¹ It was then decided that:

¹⁰⁶Everett, Zainunnissa (Cissie) Gool, 11. She confuses the two meetings, using the report of 15 February to refer to the meeting in fact reported on in the *Sun* of 22 February.

¹⁰⁷Ray Alexander, personal communication; also Ray Alexander, Unpublished autobiography. See Drew, *Discordant Comrades*. It is not known when Cissie left the Party; she certainly did not rejoin when it was established as an underground Party, having been banned in 1950.

¹⁰⁸The Commission's evidence may be read in UCT M&A: BCZA 85/23, Dr Abdurahman collection, microfilm, reel 3.

¹⁰⁹See S Johns, *Raising the red flag: The International Socialist League and the Communist Party of South Africa, 1914 - 1932*. Bellville: Mayibuye, 1995 for a description of La Guma's abortive attempts to start a branch of the League against Imperialism and War. He had attended the League's international congress in 1927. Eddie Roux was also involved in trying to start a local branch.

¹¹⁰A La Guma, *Biography*, ed. M Adhikari, 58. The biography asserts that this was 1934, but if the Group of 15 was only established in 1935, this must have been in 1935.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 58.

in order to attract all sections of the people, somebody of important standing, but of progressive views, should be invited to become president of the League. Thus the organisers approached Mrs Zainunnissa (Cissy) Gool, who accepted. ... Thus the National Liberation League was launched under the slogan of 'For Equality, Land and freedom', its emblem a black slave with severed chains, holding aloft a flaming torch.¹¹²

Whether Cissie Gool was nominated to the position of president purely as a draw-card or figure-head, or whether she and others beyond La Guma's circle co-founded the League, her nomination was later confirmed by the electorate. Cissie Gool became the first black woman to preside over a national liberatory organisation, and in doing so definitively launched her political career.

¹¹²Ibid., 58 - 59.

Conclusion

This thesis has sought to demonstrate that, even in the face of sparse sources, it is possible to write a history of a life. In an African colonial, and post-colonial, context in which most lives are profoundly silenced in official sources, close interrogation of a thin resource base may open windows onto those lives. Where very few people remain alive who remember the historical period, oral sources, like documentary sources, are rare. This thesis has relied on the kinds of historical sources that are used in conventional historical research: newspapers, magazines, university records, personal manuscript collections, estate papers, oral memories and written memoirs. However, in this case, each record contains very few references to the historical subject. In many of the personal collections of people who were friends and associates of Cissie Gool, there is no mention of her at all. Each record, each utterance, must be examined minutely, and one must be alert to factual errors which mislead (such as the spelling of 'Hobday' for 'Hogben', or dates of birth), as well as other forms of bias within the sources. Each sentence, each phrase, that mentioned Cissie Gool, or in her absence, the people in the circles with which she associated, was seized upon and interrogated for clues to her life. In a sense, each source was perceived as a grain of sand, which, if it did not hold a world, held clues to that world. Nothing was irrelevant. Each mention of Cissie Gool - so often as an aside - in newspapers or memoirs, enriches one's understanding of her life. Each time she hosted a party, or attended a lecture, or wrote an examination, or an article, or posed for a magazine, a different perspective emerges on that life.

Working within a feminist paradigm, the process of research is highlighted in the text, as is the authorial presence. Feminist history, like historical philosophy, 'brings the conceptual apparatus by which the facts are ordered in the discourse to the surface of the text, while history proper (as it is called) buries it in the interior of the narrative, where it serves as a hidden or implicit shaping device.'¹ The character of the source base underlines the need to highlight the research process; it also foregrounds the centrality of the historical imagination to historical discourse. As Lloyd Kramer notes:

the fictive element in historical narratives threatens historians only if they insist on rigidly defining history according to the nineteenth-century scientific theory that

¹Hayden White, cited in L S Kramer, *Literature and historical imagination*. In L Hunt, ed. *The new cultural history*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, 102.

posits a radical distinction between fact and philosophy or between fact and fiction. By challenging that distinction, however, historians can expand the definition of what they do and thus help to transform the discipline into a more creative, self-conscious, critical enterprise.²

A feminist approach permits one to challenge not only claims to universality, but also such dualities as fact and fiction, black and white. The lives of Cissie Gool and her birth and marriage families underlined the ambiguities of racial identity, the interstices of race, gender and class, and undermined racial binaries.³ As historians, we can do no less. An openness to interdisciplinary approaches is also useful in the absence of substantial sources. So, for example, Cissie Gool's creative, personal and journalistic writing is analysed using literary analytic techniques. Just as nothing is irrelevant, so nothing is presented as an authoritative interpretation or the final word.

The first three chapters explore the construction of the ancestry, childhood and adolescence of a younger daughter in a family within Cape Town's black elite, at the turn of the twentieth century. In the absence of historical research with which to locate this life, these chapters provide initial suggestions about the meanings of early life stages. Through an exploration of the official organ of the African Political Organisation, which reflected Cissie's father's views, it is possible to trace the significance of being a daughter, rather than a son, within the APO community. Gender roles were clear, but became blurred over the course of Cissie's childhood. Initially, women were exhorted to 'civilise the race' of Coloured people, through wife- and mother-hood. Politics was the province of men. However, Cissie's mother, Nellie Abdurahman and other women, started the APO Women's Guild, and whereas this was portrayed as 'apolitical', it allowed women to do political work within the community, eventually joining men on overt political deputations to government.

Nevertheless, girls were brought up in the company of their mothers: neither women nor girls were members of the APO proper. The APO reflects the significant role that the organisation expected women to play - a role that has been ignored in the historical literature - and it reflected an image of childhood achievement as proof of the civilised

²Kramer, *Literature and historical imagination*, 102.

³C Beasley, *What is feminism? An introduction to feminist theory*. London: Sage, 1999, 8 - 9.

status of the Coloured community. Cissie and her sister Rosie were key actors in this performance.

While the second chapter focuses on Cissie's childhood to the age of about fourteen, the third explores aspects of what would later come to be characterised as 'adolescence'. Puberty was of central importance to the life cycle of girls in District Six, but the Abdurahman daughters and several others within the elite experienced an extended childhood. An examination of Cissie and Rosie's creative and Cissie's personal writing from this period suggests that this was a difficult period in their lives, and that they did not fit the perfect stereotype reflected in the *APO*.

The fourth chapter explores different sources relating to Cissie Abdurahman's early adulthood, from 1918 to 1927. The University of Cape Town records are used to provide a solid framework of her studies, which were to be a constant aspect of most of her adult life. This kind of research seduces one to conform to more conventional historical discourse, pointing to the ease with which one slips into hiding the 'scaffolding' of one's narrative when the sources are rich. The chapter also explores aspects of Cissie's marriage to A H Gool, based largely on the memories of their surviving son, Rustum. Thus the early years of their marriage are surveyed through the lens of a young child. This period also saw Cissie Gool's involvement in 'Indian' politics, along with her husband and father; her role is discovered through asides in newspaper articles, the memories of her sister-in-law and brief comments in family papers. Whereas men were clearly dominant in protest campaigns of this nature, Sarojini Naidu demonstrated that women could play central - perhaps the most important - roles in international government deliberations.

The fifth and six chapters trace the beginnings of Cissie Gool's radicalisation, and the disintegration of her parents' marriage, and her own. In both cases, it is impossible to pin down the date of separation, so it is impossible to construct a neat causal narrative linking family trauma to political trajectories. However, it is clear that as the influence of Dr Abdurahman in particular declined, Cissie Gool - and her mother - shifted their political position to the left. Nellie Abdurahman also stood for the Cape Town City Council, and her daughter would follow in her footsteps a decade later. Although Dr Abdurahman was a City Councillor, Nellie Abdurahman's example, as a woman, was significant.

The fifth chapter explores two shreds of evidence that suggest an ‘unreconstructed’ political position c1928. Around this time, Cissie Gool became involved in circles of intellectuals associated with lecturers at the University of Cape Town, where she continued to study. Oral sources pointed me in their direction initially, and practically no evidence could be found in the documentary sources. Trusting the information given to me by family members, however, I proceeded to discover everything I could about these circles. I suggest that because Cissie Gool was friendly with the likes of Fred Bodmer and Lance Hogben, the content of their discussions and the heterodoxy of their politics would have influenced her political trajectory. In these sources, men predominate; as throughout, women are muted. By 1930, Cissie Gool was in a position to stand on political platforms demanding the abolition of racist legislation; by 1931 she could declare that she was ‘going Red’.

The final chapter examines the evidence for Cissie Gool’s radicalisation outside the circles discussed in the previous chapter. Newspaper reports allow for an exploration of her increasingly public political presence in Cape Town politics, but the process of Cissie Gool’s radicalisation is more difficult to discover. There is evidence of increasing involvement with circles to the left of the APO, as she developed friendships with members of the Communist Party in particular. At the same time, her family linked her to ‘Trotskyist’ circles, and she straddled the two. The chapter, and thesis, ends with Cissie agreeing to take on the presidency of the National Liberation League, the first political organisation to challenge her father’s dominance.

Within a historiography which privileges the political achievements of men, and assumes that ‘political’ histories are men’s histories, this thesis foregrounds particular women’s political work, and highlights the importance of gender in the construction of ‘men’s politics’. Within a historiography that marginalises children, and that has not yet begun to explore the changing meanings of being a gendered, raced, young person in the South African past, this thesis argues that a careful investigation of seemingly impenetrable sources renders this possible.

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Abu Desai
Ayesha Fakier, by email
Alie Fataar
Sadie Forman
Amina Gool and her daughter, Daria
Rustum Gool, by email
Rustum Gool, by telephone
Gairoonisa Paleker
Ray Alexander Simons
Amy Thornton
Pat Wagner

Anonymous interviewees: Some interviewees chose to remain anonymous and have been designated by arbitrary initials.

Videotaped interviews by Gairoonisa Paleker lodged in the Centre for Popular Memory, University of Cape Town, nd c2001.

Jean Bernhardt
R O Dudley
Alie Fataar
Selim Gool
Pauline Podbury
Ray Simons
Amy Thornton

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